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ENCOUNTER

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William Faulkner

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P. G. Wodehouse

THE ELUSIVENESS OF HISTORY
Arnold J. Toynbee

SHANTA: INDIA'S DANCER
Jossleyn Hennessy

THE "THINKING" MACHINE
Christopher Strachey

ARTICLES, REVIEWS, AND POETRY
Dannie Abse, J. M. Cameron, Patric Dickinson, Tom Scott, Michael Hamburger, Dan Jacobson, William Pickles, Burns Singer, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Sacheverell Sitwell, Christopher Sykes

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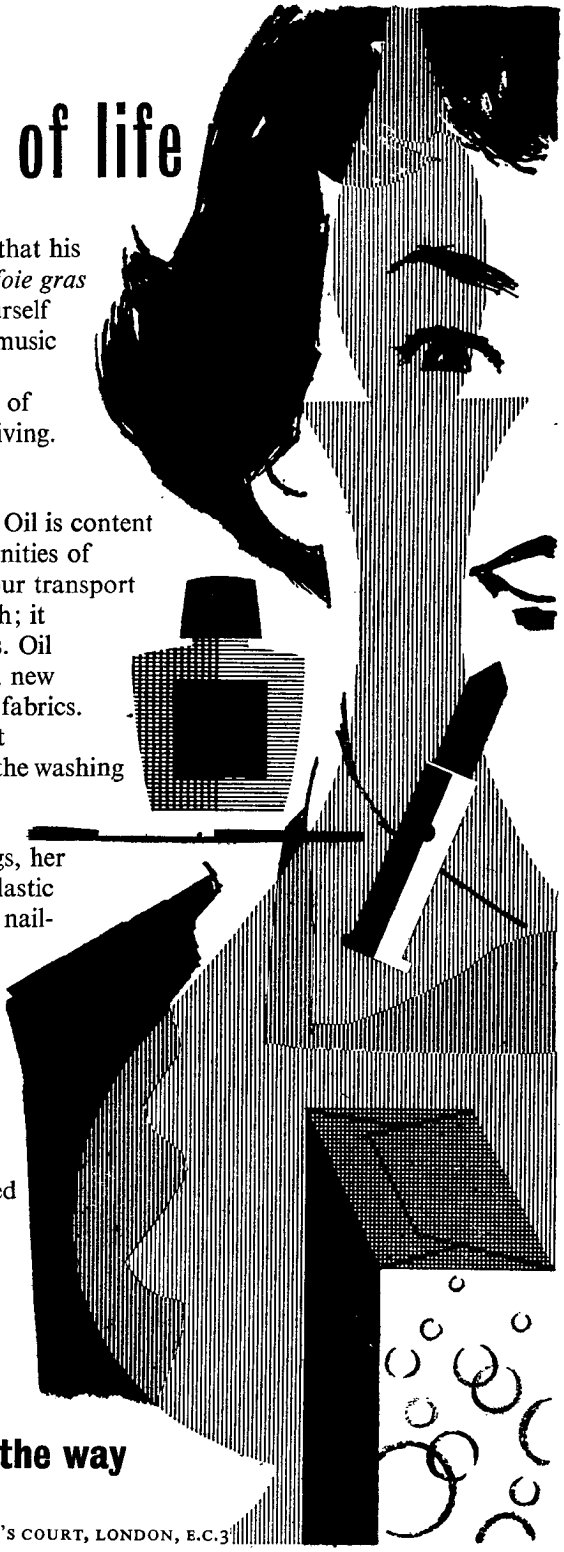

The Rev. Sydney Smith confessed that his idea of heaven was eating *pate de foie gras* to the sound of trumpets. You yourself may be a vegetarian, and not like music with your meals. You will have your own conception of a pinnacle of happiness, a flashpoint of Better Living.

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William Faulkner

Mississippi

[A note to British readers:—There is the case of the visitor to the state of Mississippi who expressed a wish to tour Yoknapatawpha county. It was an understandable wish, and is shared by most of us who are readers of Faulkner. Unfortunately, this county, the scene of most of Faulkner's novels, does not exist outside them; and it is a tribute to his art that its reality should press so heavily on us.

There is, of course, in literal fact a state of Mississippi, with a gross area of 48,000 square miles in the heart of the Deep South, and a population of a little more than 2,000,000. It is about this home state of his that Faulkner is here writing. But not only about this state—he is also writing about a Mississippi which exists in art as well as in fact. It is *his* Mississippi which he here describes, and if it is not quite identical with the geographer's or the historian's, it is certainly no less real, and is perhaps more so. One can find out about some of the people he mentions (Bilbo, Vardaman) by consulting an American history textbook. For others (the Snopeses, for instance), we have to turn to Faulkner's novels and stories. Both are an intrinsic part of the "real" Mississippi.—Ed.]

MISSISSIPPI begins in the lobby of a Memphis, Tennessee, hotel and extends south to the Gulf of Mexico. It is dotted with little towns concentric about the ghosts of the horses and mules once tethered to the hitch-rail enclosing the county courthouse and it might almost be said to have only two directions, north and south, since until a few years ago it was impossible to travel east or west in it unless you walked or rode one of the horses or mules. Even in the boy's early manhood, to reach by rail either of the adjacent county towns thirty miles away to the east or west, you had to travel ninety miles in three directions on three different railroads.

In the beginning it was virgin—to the west, along the Big River, the alluvial swamps threaded by black, almost motionless bayous and impenetrable with cane and buckvine and cypress and ash and oak and gum; to the east, the hardwood ridges and the prairies where the Appalachian Mountains died and buffalo grazed; to the south, the pine barrens and the moss-hung live oaks and the greater swamps, less of earth than water and lurking with alligators and water moccasins, where Louisiana in its time would begin.

And where in the beginning the predecessors crept with their simple artifacts, and built the mounds and vanished, bequeathing only the mounds in which the succeeding recordable Muskhogean stock would leave the skulls of their warriors and chiefs and babies and slain bears, and the shards of pots, and hammer- and arrow-heads and now and then a heavy silver Spanish spur.

There were deer to drift in herds alarmless as smoke then, and bear and panther and wolves in the brakes and bottoms, and all the lesser beasts—coon and possum and beaver and mink and mushrat (not muskrat: mushrat); they were still there and some of the land was still virgin in the early nineteen hundreds when the boy himself began to hunt. But except for looking occasionally out from behind the face of a white man or a Negro, the Chickasaws and Choctaws

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and Natchez and Yazoos were as gone as the predecessors; and the people the boy crept with were the descendants of the Sartorises and de Spains and Compsons who had commanded the Manassas and Sharpsburg and Shiloh and Chickamauga regiments, and the McCaslins and Ewells and Holstons and Hogganbecks whose fathers and grandfathers had manned them, and now and then a Snopes too because by the beginning of the twentieth century Snopeses were everywhere: not only behind the counters of grubby little side-street stores patronised mostly by Negroes, but behind the presidents' desks of banks and the directors' tables of wholesale grocery corporations and in the deaconries of Baptist churches, buying up the decayed Georgian houses and chopping them into apartments and on their deathbeds decreeing annexes and baptismal fonts to the churches as mementoes to themselves or maybe out of simple terror.

The Snopeses hunted too. They too were in the camps where the de Spains and Compsons and McCaslins and Ewells were masters in their hierarchal turn, shooting the does not only when law but the Master too said not, shooting them not even because the meat was needed but leaving the meat itself to be eaten by scavengers in the woods, shooting it simply because it was big and moving and alien, of an older time than the little grubby stores and the accumulating and compounding money; the boy a man now and in his hierarchal turn Master of the camp and coping, having to cope, not with the diminishing wilderness where there was less and less game, but with the Snopeses who were destroying that little which did remain.

These elected the Bilboes and voted indefatigably for the Vardamans, naming their sons after both. Their origin was in bitter hatred and fear and economic rivalry of the Negroes who farmed little farms no larger than and adjacent to their own, because the Negro, remembering when he had not been free at all, was therefore capable of valuing what he had of freedom enough to struggle to retain even that little and had taught himself how to do more with less: to raise more cotton with less money to spend and food to eat and fewer or inferior tools to work with; this, until he, the Snopes, could escape from the land into the little grubby side-street store where he could live not beside the Negro but on him by marking up on the inferior meat and meal and molasses the price which he, the Negro, could not even always read.

In the beginning, the obsolescent, dispossessed tomorrow by the already obsolete: the wild Muskhogean—Chickasaw and Choctaw and Natchez and Pascagoula—looked down from the tall Mississippi bluffs at a Chippeway canoe containing three Frenchmen—and had barely time to whirl and look behind him at a thousand Spaniards come overland from the Atlantic Ocean, and for a little while longer had the privilege of watching an ebb-flux-ebb-flux of alien nationalities as rapid as the magician's spill and evanishment of inconstant cards: the Frenchman for a second, then the Spaniard for perhaps two, then the Frenchman for another two, then the Frenchman for another two and then the Spaniard again and then the Frenchman again for that last half-breath before the Anglo-Saxon, who would come to stay, to endure: the tall man roaring with Protestant Scripture and boiled whisky, Bible and jug in one hand and like as not an Indian tomahawk in the other, brawling, turbulent, uxorious and polygamous: a married invincible bachelor without destination but only motion, advancement, dragging his gravid wife and most of his mother-in-law's kin behind him into the trackless wilderness, to spawn that child behind a log-crotched rifle and then get her with another one before they moved again, and at the same time scattering his inexhaustible other seed in three hundred miles of dusky bellies: without avarice or compassion or forethought either: felling a tree which took two hundred years to grow, to extract from it a bear or a capful of wild honey.

He endured, even after he too was obsolete, the younger sons of Virginia and Carolina planters coming to replace him in wagons laden with slaves and indigo seedlings over the very roads he had hacked out with little else but the tomahawk. Then someone gave a Natchez doctor a Mexican cotton seed (maybe with the boll weevil already in it since, like the Snopeses,

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it too has taken over the Southern earth) and changed the whole face of Mississippi. Slaves were clearing rapidly now the virgin land, lurking still—in 1850—with the ghosts of Murrell and Mason and Hare and the two Harpes, into plantation fields for profit where he, the displaced and obsolete, had wanted only the bear and the deer and the sweetening for his tooth. But he remained, hung on still; he is still there even in the boy's middle-age, living in a log or plank or tin hut on the edge of what remains of the fading wilderness, by and on the tolerance and sometimes even the bounty of the plantation owner to whom, in his intractable way and even with a certain dignity and independence, he is a sycophant, trapping coons and muskrats, now that the bear and the panther are almost gone too, improvident still, felling still the two-hundred-year-old tree even though it has only a coon or a squirrel in it now.

Manning, when that time came, not the Manassas and Shiloh regiments but confederating into irregular bands and gangs owning not much allegiance to anyone or anything, unified instead into the one rite and aim of stealing horses from Federal picket lines; this in the intervals of raiding (or trying to) the plantation house of the very man to whom he had been the independent sycophant and intended to be again, once the war was over and presuming that the man came back from his Sharpsburg or Chickamauga majority or colonelcy or whatever it had been. Trying to raid, that is, until the major's or colonel's wife or aunt or mother-in-law, who had buried the silver in the orchard and still held together a few of the older slaves, fended him off and dispersed him, and when necessary even shot him, with the absent husband's or nephew's or son-in-law's hunting gun or duelling pistols. The women: the indomitable, the undefeated, who never surrendered, refusing to allow the Yankee *minie* balls to be dug out of portico column or mantelpiece or lintel, who seventy years later would get up and walk out of *Gone With the Wind* as soon as Sherman's name was mentioned; irreconcilable and enraged and still talking about it long after the weary exhausted men who had fought and lost it gave up trying to make them hush: even in the boy's time the boy himself knowing about Vicksburg and Corinth and exactly where his grandfather's regiment had been at First Manassas before he remembered hearing very much about Santa Claus.

In those days—1901 and '02 and '03 and '04—Santa Claus occurred only at Christmas, not like now, and for the rest of the year children played with what they could find or contrive or make, though just as now, in '51 and '52 and '53 and '54, they still played, aped in miniature, what they had been exposed to, heard or seen or been moved by most. Which was true in the child's time and case too: the indomitable unsurrendered old women holding together still, thirty-five and forty years later, a few of the old house slaves: women too who, like the white ones, refused to give up the old ways and forget the old anguishes. The child himself remembered one of them: Caroline: free these many years but who had declined to leave. Nor would she ever accept in full her weekly Saturday wages; the family never knew why unless the true reason was the one which appeared: for the simple pleasure of keeping the entire family reminded constantly that they were in arrears to her, compelling the boy's grandfather then his father and finally himself in his turn to be not only her banker but her book-keeper too, having got the figure of eighty-nine dollars into her head somehow or for some reason, and though the sum itself altered, sometimes more and sometimes less, and sometimes it would be she herself who would be several weeks in arrears, it never changed: one of the children, white or Negro, liable to appear at any time, usually when most of the family would be gathered at a meal, with the message: "Mammy says to tell you not to forget you owe her eighty-nine dollars."

To the child, even at that time, she seemed already older than God, calling his grandsire "colonel" but never the child's father nor the father's brother and sister by anything but their Christian names even when they themselves had become grandparents: a matriarch with a score of descendants (and probably half that many more whom she had forgotten or outlived), one of them a boy too, whether a great

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grandson or merely a grandson even she did not remember, born in the same week with the white child and both bearing the same (the white child's grandsire's) name, suckled at the same black breast and sleeping and eating together and playing together the game which was the most important thing the white child knew at that time since at four and five and six his world was still a female world and he had heard nothing else that he could remember: with empty spools and chips and sticks and a scraped trench filled with well water for the River, playing over again in miniature the War, the old irremediable battles—Shiloh and Vicksburg, and Brice's Crossroads which was not far from where the child (both of them) had been born, the boy because he was white arrogating to himself the right to be the Confederate General—Pemberton or Johnston or Forrest—twice to the black child's once, else, lacking that once in three, the black one would not play at all.

Not the tall man, he was still the hunter, the man of the woods; and not the slave because he was free now; but that Mexican cotton seed which someone had given the Natchez doctor was clearing the land fast now, ploughing under the buffalo grass of the eastern prairies and the brier and switch cane of the creek and river bottoms of the central hills and deswamping the whole vast, flat, alluvial, delta-shaped sweep of land along the Big River, the Old Man: building the levees to hold him off the land long enough to plant and harvest the crop: he taking another foot of slope in his new dimension for every foot man constricted him in the old, so that the steamboats carrying the baled cotton to Memphis or New Orleans seemed to crawl along the sky itself.

And little steamboats on the smaller rivers, too, penetrating the Tallahatchie as far up as Wylie's Crossing above Jefferson. Though most of the cotton from that section—and on to the east to that point of no economic return where it was more expedient to continue on east to the Tombigbee and then south to Mobile—went the sixty miles overland to Memphis by mule and wagon; there was a settlement—a tavern of sorts and a smithy and a few gaunt cabins—on the bluff above Wylie's, at the exact distance where a wagon or a train of them loaded with cotton either starting or resuming the journey in the vicinity of Jefferson, would have to halt for the night. Or not even a settlement but rather a den, whose denizens lurked unseen by day in the brakes and thickets of the river bottom, appearing only at night and even then only long enough to enter the tavern kitchen where the driver of the day's cotton wagon sat unsuspecting before the fire, whereupon driver, wagon, mules and cotton and all would vanish: the body into the river probably and the wagon burned and the mules sold days or weeks later in a Memphis stockyard and the unidentifiable cotton already on its way to the Liverpool mill.

At the same time, sixteen miles away in Jefferson, there was a pre-Snopes, one of the tall men actually, a giant of a man in fact: a dedicated lay Baptist preacher but furious not with a furious unsleeping dream of paradise nor even for universal Order with an upper-case O, but for simple civic security. He was warned by everyone not to go in there because not only could he accomplish nothing, he would very likely lose his own life trying it. But he did go, alone, and talked not of gospel nor God nor even of virtue, but simply sketched the biggest and boldest and by appearance, anyway, the most villainous there and said to him: "I'll fight you. If you lick me, you take what money I have. If I lick you, I baptize you into my church": and battered and mauled and gouged that one into sanctity and civic virtue then challenged the next biggest and most villainous and then the next; and the following Sunday baptized the entire settlement in the river, the cotton wagons now crossing on Wylie's hand-powered ferry and passing peacefully and unchallenged on to Memphis until the railroad came and took the bales away from them.

That was in the seventies. The Negro was a free farmer and a political entity now; one, he could not sign his name, was Federal marshal at Jefferson. Afterwards he became the town's official bootlegger (Mississippi was one of the first to essay the noble experiment, along with Maine), resuming—he had never really quitted it—his old allegiance to his old master and

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gaining his professional name, Mulberry, from the huge old tree behind Doctor Habersham's drug-store, in the gallery-like tunnels among the roots of which he cached the bottled units of his commerce.

Soon he (the Negro) would even forge ahead in that economic rivalry with Snopes which was to send Snopes in droves into the Ku Klux Klan—not the old original one of the war's chaotic and desperate end which, measured against the desperate times, was at least honest and serious in its desperate aim, but into the later base one of the twenties whose only kinship to the old one was the old name. And a little money to build railroads was in the land now, brought there by the man who in '66 had been a carpetbagger but who now was a citizen; his children would speak the soft consonantless Negro tongue as the children of parents who had lived below the Potomac and Ohio Rivers since Captain John Smith, and their children would boast of their Southern heritage.

In Jefferson his name was Redmond. He had found the money with which Colonel Sartoris had opened the local cotton fields to Europe by building his connecting line up to the main rail-road from Memphis to the Atlantic Ocean—narrow gauge, like a toy, with three tiny locomotives like toys, too, named after Colonel Sartoris' three daughters, each with its silver-plated oilcan engraved with the daughter's Christian name: like toys, the standard-sized cars jacked up at the junction, then lowered on to the narrow trucks, the tiny locomotive now invisible ahead of its charges so that they appeared in process of being snatched headlong among the fields they served by an arrogant plume of smoke and the arrogant shrieking of a whistle. It was Redmond who, after the inevitable quarrel, finally shot Colonel Sartoris dead on a Jefferson street, driven, everyone believed, to the desperate act by the same arrogance and intolerance which had driven Colonel Sartoris' regiment to demote him from its colonelcy in the fall elections after Second Manassas and Sharpsburg.

So there were railroads in the land now; now couples who used to go overland by carriage to the River landings and the steamboats for the traditional New Orleans honeymoon could take the train from almost anywhere. And presently Pullmans, too, all the way from Chicago and the Northern cities where the cash, the money was, so that the rich Northerners could come down in comfort and open the land indeed: setting up with their Yankee dollars the vast lumbering plants and mills in the Southern-pine section, the little towns which had been hamlets without change or alteration for fifty years, booming and soaring into cities overnight above the stump-pocked barrens which would remain until in simple economic desperation people taught themselves to farm pine trees as in other sections they had already learned to farm corn and cotton.

And Northern lumber mills in the Delta too: the mid-twenties now and the Delta booming with cotton and timber both. But mostly booming with simple money: increment a troglodyte which had fathered twin troglodytes: solvency and bankruptcy, the three of them booming money into the land so fast that the problem was how to get rid of it before it whelmed you into suffocation. Until in something almost resembling self-defense, seven or eight of the bigger Delta towns formed a baseball league, presently raiding as far away—and successfully too—for pitchers and short-stops and slugging outfielders as the two major leagues; the boy, a young man now, making acquaintance with this league and one of the big Northern lumber companies not only coincidently with one another but because of one another.

At this time the young man's attitude was that of most other young men who had been around twenty-one years of age in April 1917, even though at times he did admit to himself that he was possibly using the fact that he had been nineteen on that day as an excuse to follow the avocation he was coming more and more to know would be forever his true one: to be a tramp, a harmless possessionless vagabond. In any case, he was quite ripe to make the acquaintance of the league; it began with that of the lumber company, which at the moment was taking a leisurely bankruptcy. A lawyer had been appointed referee in the bankruptcy: a friend of the young man's family and older than he, yet who had taken a liking to the young

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man and so invited him to come along for the ride too. His official capacity was that of interpreter, since he had a little French and the defuncting company had European connections. But no interpreting was ever done, since the entourage did not go to Europe but moved instead into a single floor of a Memphis hotel, where all—including the interpreter—had the privilege of signing chits for food and theatre tickets and even the bootleg whisky (Tennessee was in its dry mutation then) which the bellboys would produce, though not of course at the discreet and innocent-looking places clustered a few miles away just below the Mississippi state line, where roulette and dice and blackjack were available.

Then suddenly Mr. Sells Wales was in it, too, bringing the baseball league with him. The young man never did know what connection (if any) Mr. Wales had with the bankruptcy, nor really bothered to wonder, let alone care to ask, not only because he had developed already that sense of *noblesse oblige* towards the avocation which he knew was his true one, which would have been reason enough, but because Mr. Wales himself was already a legend in the Delta. Owner of a plantation measured not in acres but in miles and reputedly sole owner of one of the league baseball teams or anyway most of its players, certainly of the catcher and the base-stealing short-stop and the .340-hitting outfielder ravished or pirated, it was said, from the Chicago Cubs, his ordinary costume seven days a week was a two or three days' beard and muddy high-boots and a corduroy hunting coat, the tale, the legend telling of how he entered a swank St. Louis hotel in that costume late one night and demanded a room of a dinner-jacketed clerk, who looked once at the beard and the muddy boots but probably mostly at Mr. Wales' face and said they were filled up: whereupon Mr. Wales asked how much they wanted for the hotel and was told, superciliously, in tens of thousands, and—so told the legend—drew from his corduroy hip a wad of thousand-dollar bills sufficient to have bought the hotel half again at the price stated and told the clerk he wanted every room in the building vacated in ten minutes.

That one of course was apocryphal, but the young man himself saw this one: Mr. Wales and himself having a leisurely breakfast one noon in the Memphis hotel when Mr. Wales remembered suddenly that his private ball club was playing one of its most important games at a town about sixty miles away at three o'clock that afternoon and telephoned to the railroad station to have a special train ready for them in thirty minutes, which it was: an engine and a caboose: reaching Coahoma about three o'clock with a mile still to the ball park: a man (there were no taxis at the station at that hour and few in Mississippi anywhere at that time) sitting behind the wheel of a dingy though still sound Cadillac car, and Mr. Wales said:

"What do you want for it?"

"What?" the man in the car said.

"Your automobile," Mr. Wales said.

"Twelve fifty," the man said.

"All right," Mr. Wales said, opening the door.

"I mean twelve hundred and fifty dollars," the man said.

"All right," Mr. Wales said, then to the young man: "Jump in."

"Hold up here, Mister," the man said.

"I've bought it," Mr. Wales said, getting in too. "The ball park," he said. "Hurry."

The young man never saw the Cadillac again, though he became quite familiar with the engine and caboose during the next succeeding weeks while the league pennant race waxed hotter and hotter, Mr. Wales keeping the special train on call in the Memphis yards as twenty-five years earlier a city-dwelling millionaire might have hacked a carriage and pair to his instant nod, so that it seemed to the young man that he would barely get back to Memphis to rest before they would be rushing once more down the Delta to another baseball game.

"I ought to be interpreting, sometime," he said once.

"Interpret, then," Mr. Wales said. "Interpret what this goddamn cotton market is going to do tomorrow, and we can both quit chasing this blank blank sandlot ball team."

The cotton seed and the lumber mills were clearing the rest of the delta, too, pushing what remained of the wilderness further and further southward into the V of Big River and the

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hills. When the young man, a youth of sixteen and seventeen then, was first accepted into that hunting club of which he in his hierarchal time would be Master, the hunting grounds, haunt of deer and bear and wild turkey, could be reached in a single day or night in a mule-drawn wagon. Now they were using automobiles: a hundred miles then two hundred southward and still southward as the wilderness dwindled into the confluence of the Yazoo River and the big one, the Old Man.

The Old Man: all his little contributing streams levee'd too, along with him, and paying none of the dykes any heed at all when it suited his mood and fancy, gathering water all the way from Montana to Pennsylvania every generation or so and rolling it down the artificial gut of his victims' puny and baseless hoping, piling the water up, not fast, just inexorably, giving plenty of time to measure his crest and telegraph ahead, even warning of the exact day almost when he would enter the house and float the piano out of it and the pictures off the walls, and even remove the house itself if it were not securely fastened down.

Inexorable and unhurried, overpassing one by one his little confluent feeders and shoving the water into them until for days their current would flow backward, upstream: as far upstream as Wylie's Crossing above Jefferson. The little rivers were dyked, too, but back here was the land of individualists: remnants and descendants of the tall men now taken to farming, and of Snopeses who were more than individualists: they were Snopeses, so that where the owners of the thousand-acre plantations along the Big River confederated as one man with sandbags and machines and their Negro tenants and wage-hands to hold the sandboils and the cracks, back here the owner of the hundred- or two-hundred-acre farm patrolled his section of levee with a sandbag in one hand and his shotgun in the other, lest his upstream neighbour dynamite it to save his (the upstream neighbor's) own.

Piling up the water while white man and Negro worked side by side in shifts in the mud and the rain, with automobile headlights and gasoline flares and kegs of whisky and coffee boiling in fifty-gallon batches in scoured and scalded oil drums; lapping, tentative, almost innocently, merely inexorable (no hurry, his) among and beneath and between and finally over the frantic sandbags, as if his whole purpose had been merely to give man another chance to prove, not to him but to man, just how much the human body could bear, stand, endure; then, having let man prove it, doing what he could have done at any time these past weeks if so minded: removing with no haste, nor any particular malice or fury either, a mile or two miles of levee and coffee drums and whisky kegs and gas flares in one sloughing collapse, gleaming dully for a little while yet among the parallel cotton middles until the fields vanished along with the roads and lanes and at last the towns themselves.

Vanished, gone beneath one vast yellow motionless expanse, out of which projected only the tops of trees and telephone poles and the decapitations of human dwelling-places like enigmatic objects placed by inscrutable and impenetrable design on a dirty mirror; and the mounds of the predecessors on which, among a tangle of moccasins, bear and horses and deer and mules and wild turkeys and cows and domestic chickens waited patient in mutual armistice; and the levees themselves, where among a jumble of uxorious flotsam the young continued to be born and the old to die, not from exposure but from simple and normal time and decay, as if man and his destiny were in the end stronger even than the river which had dispossessed him, inviolable by and invincible to alteration.

Then, having proved that too, he—the Old Man—would withdraw, not retreat: subside, back from the land slowly and inexorably too, emptying the confluent rivers and bayous back into the old vain hopeful gut, but so slowly and gradually that not the waters seemed to fall but the flat earth itself to rise, creep in one plane back into light and air again: one constant stain of yellow-brown at one constant altitude on telephone poles and the walls of gins and houses and stores as though the line had been laid off with a transit and painted in one gigantic unbroken brush stroke, the earth itself one alluvial inch higher, the rich dirt one inch deeper,

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drying into long cracks beneath the hot fierce glare of May: but not for long, because almost at once came the plough, the ploughing and planting already two months late but that did not matter: the cotton man-tall once more by August and whiter and denser still by picking time, as if the Old Man said, "I do what I want to, when I want to. But I pay my way."

And the boats, of course, they projected above that yellow and liquid plane and even moved upon it: the skiffs and scows of fishermen and trappers, the launches of the United States Engineers who operated the Levee Commission, and one small shallow-draught steamboat in paradox among and across the cotton fields themselves, its pilot not a riverman but a farmer who knew where the submerged fences were, its masthead lookout a mechanic with a pair of pliers to cut the telephone wires to pass the smokestack through: no paradox really, since on the River it had resembled a house to begin with, so that here it looked no different from the baseless houses it steamed among and on occasion even strained at top boiler pressure to overtake, like a mallard drake after a fleeing mallard hen.

But these boats were not enough, very quickly not near enough, the Old Man meant business indeed this time. So now there began to arrive from the Gulf ports the shrimp trawlers and pleasure cruisers and Coast Guard cutters whose bottoms had known only salt water and the mouths of tidal rivers, to be run still by their salt-water crews but conned by the men who knew where the submerged roads and fences were for the good reason that they had been running mule-plough furrows along them or up to them all their lives; sailing among the swollen carcasses of horses and mules and deer and cows and sheep to pluck the Old Man's patient flotsam, black and white, out of trees and the roofs of gins and cotton sheds and floating cabins and the second-storey windows of houses and office buildings; then—the salt-water men, to whom land was either a featureless treeless salt marsh or a snake- and alligator-infested swamp impenetrable with trumpet vine and Spanish moss, some of whom had never even seen the earth into which were driven the spiles supporting the houses they lived in—staying on even after they were no longer needed, as though waiting to see emerge from the water what sort of country it was which bore the economy on which the people—men and women, black and white, more of black than white even, ten to one more—lived whom they had saved; seeing the land for that moment before mule and plough altered it right up to the water's receding edge, then back into the River again before the trawlers and cruisers and cutters became marooned into canted and useless rubble too along with the ruined hencoops and cowsheds and privies; back on to the Old Man, shrunken once more into his normal banks, drowsing and even innocent looking, as if it were something else besides him that had changed, for a little time anyway, the whole face of the adjacent earth.

They were homeward bound now, passing the river towns, some of which were respectable in age when South Mississippi was a Spanish wilderness: Greenville and Vicksburg, Natchez and Grand Gulf and Petit Gulf (vanished now and even the old site known by a different name) which had known Mason and one at least of the Harpes and from or on which Murrell had based his abortive slave insurrection intended to efface the white people from the land and leave him emperor of it—the land sinking away beyond the levee until presently you could no longer say where water began and earth stopped: only that these lush and verdant sunny savannas would no longer bear your weight. The rivers flowed no longer west, but south now, no longer yellow or brown, but black, threading the miles of yellow salt marsh from which, on an off-shore breeze, mosquitoes came in such clouds that in your itching and burning anguish it would seem that you could actually see them in faint adumbration crossing the earth; and met tide and then the uncorrupted salt: not the Gulf quite yet but at least the Sound behind the long barrier of the islands—Ship and Horn and Petit Bois, the trawler and cruiser bottoms home again now among the lighthouses and channel markers and shipyards and drying nets and processing plants for fish.

The man remembered that from his youth too: one summer spent being blown innocently

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over in cat-boats since, born and bred for generations in the north Mississippi hinterland, he did not recognise the edge of a squall until he already had one. The next summer he returned because he found that he liked that much water, this time as a hand in one of the trawlers; remembering: a four-gallon iron pot over a red bed of charcoal on the foredeck, in which decapitated shrimp boiled among handfuls of salt and black pepper, never emptied, never washed and constantly renewed, so that you ate them all day long in passing like peanuts; remembering: the predawn, to be broken presently by the violent near-subtropical yellow-and-crimson day almost like an audible explosion, but still dark for a little while yet, the dark ship creeping on to the shrimp grounds in a soundless sternward swirl of phosphorus like a drowning tumble of fireflies, the youth lying face down on the peak staring into the dark water watching the disturbed shrimp burst outward-shooting in fiery and fading fans like the trails of tiny rockets.

He learned the barrier islands too; one of a crew of five amateurs sailing a big sloop in offshore races, he learned not only how to keep a hull on its keel and moving but how to get it from one place to another and bring it back: so that, a professional now, living in New Orleans, he commanded for pay a power launch belonging to a bootlegger (this was the twenties), whose crew consisted of a Negro cook-deckhand-stevedore and the bootlegger's younger brother Pete: a slim twenty-one-or-two-year-old Italian with yellow eyes like a cat and a silk shirt bulged faintly by an armpit-holstered pistol too small in calibre to have done anything but got them all killed, even if the captain or the cook had dreamed of resisting or resenting trouble if and when it came; the captain or the cook would extract the pistol from the holster and hide it at the first opportunity (not concealed really: just dropped into the oily bilge under the engine, where, even though Pete soon discovered where it would be, it was safe because he refused to thrust his hand and arm into the oil-fouled water but instead merely lay about the cockpit, sulking); taking the launch across Pontchartrain and down the Rigolets cut to the Gulf, the Sound, then lying-to with no lights showing until the Coast Guard cutter (it ran almost on schedule; theirs was a job, too, even if it was, comparatively speaking, a hopeless one) made its fast haughty eastward rush, going, they always liked to believe, to Mobile, to a dance; then by compass on to the island (it was little more than a sandspit bearing a line of ragged and shabby pines thrashing always in the windy crash and roar of the true Gulf on the other side of it) where the Caribbean schooner would bury the casks of green alcohol which the bootlegger's mother back in New Orleans would convert and bottle and label into Scotch or Bourbon or gin. There were a few wild cattle on the island which they would have to watch for, the Negro digging and Pete still sulking and refusing to help at all because of the pistol, and the captain watching for the charge (they couldn't risk showing a light) which every three or four trips would come—the gaunt, wild, half-seen shapes charging suddenly and with no warning down at them as they turned and ran through the nightmare sand and hurled themselves into the dinghy, to pull along parallel to the shore, the animals following, until they had tolled them far enough away for the Negro to go back ashore for the remaining casks. Then they would heave-to again and lie until the cutter passed back westward, the dance obviously over now, in the same haughty and imperious rush.

That was Mississippi too, though a different one from where the child had been bred; the people were Catholics, the Spanish and French blood still showed in the names and faces. But it was not a deep one, if you did not count the sea and the boats on it: a curve of beach, a thin unbroken line of estates and apartment hotels owned and inhabited by Chicago millionaires, standing back to back with another thin line, this time of tenements inhabited by Negroes and whites who ran the boats and worked in the fish-processing plants.

THEN the Mississippi which the young man knew began: the fading purlieus inhabited by a people whom the young man recognised because their like was in his country too: descendants, heirs at least in spirit, of the tall

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men, who worked in no factories and farmed no land nor even truck patches, living not out of the earth but on its denizens: fishing guides and individual professional fishermen, trappers of muskrats and alligator hunters and poachers of deer, the land rising now, once more earth instead of half water, vista-ed and arras-ed with the long-leaf pines which Northern capital would convert into dollars in Ohio and Indiana and Illinois banks. Though not all of it. Some of it would alter hamlets and villages into cities and even build whole new ones almost overnight, cities with Mississippi names but patterned on Ohio and Indiana and Illinois because they were bigger than Mississippi towns, rising, standing today among the tall pines which created them, then tomorrow (that quick, that fast, that rapid) among the stumpy pock-age to which they were monuments. Because the land had made its one crop: the soil too fine and light to compete seriously in cotton: until people discovered that it would grow what other soils would not: the tomatoes and strawberries and the fine cane for sugar: not the sorghum of the northern and western counties which people of the true cane country called hog feed, but the true sweet cane which made the sugarhouse molasses.

Big towns, for Mississippi: cities, we called them: Hattiesburg, and Laurel, and Meridian, and Canton; and towns deriving by name from further away than Ohio: Kosciusko named after a Polish general who thought that people should be free who wanted to be; and Egypt because there was corn there when it was nowhere else in the bad lean times of the old war which the old women had still never surrendered; and Philadelphia where the Neshoba Indians whose name the county bears still remain for the simple reason that they did not mind living in peace with other people, no matter what their color or politics. This was the hills now: Jones County which old Newt Knight, its principal proprietor and first citizen or denizen, whichever you liked, seceded from the Confederacy in 1862, establishing still a third republic within the boundaries of the United States until a Confederate military force subdued him in his embattled log-castle capital; and Sullivan's Hollow: a long narrow glen where a few clans or families with North Ireland and Highland names feuded and slew one another in the old pre-Culloden fashion, yet banding together immediately and always to resist any outsider in the pre-Culloden fashion too: *vide* the legend of the revenue officer hunting illicit whisky stills, captured and held prisoner in a stable and worked in traces as the mate to a plough mule. No Negro ever let darkness catch him in Sullivan's Hollow. In fact, there were few Negroes in this country at all: a narrow strip of which extended up into the young man's own section: a remote district through which Negroes passed infrequently and rapidly and only by daylight.

It is not very wide, because almost at once there begins to the east of it the prairie country which sheds its water into Alabama and Mobile Bay, with its old tight intermarried towns and plantation houses columned and porticoed in the traditional Georgian manner of Virginia and Carolina in place of the Spanish and French influence of Natchez. These towns are Columbus and Aberdeen and West Point, and Shuqualak, where the good quail shooting is and the good bird dogs are bred and trained—horses too: hunters; Dancing Rabbit is here, too, where the treaty dispossessing them of Mississippi was made between the Choctaws and the United States; and in one of the towns lived a kinsman of the young man, dead now, rest him: an invincible and incorrigible bachelor, a leader of cotillions and an inveterate diner-out since any time an extra single man was needed, any hostess thought of him first.

But he was a man's man, too, and even more: a young man's man, who played poker and matched glasses with the town's young bachelors and the apostates still young enough in time to still resist the wedlock; who walked not only in spats and a stick and yellow gloves and a Homburg hat, but an air of sardonic and inviolable atheism, too, until at last he was forced to the final desperate resort of prayer: sitting after supper one night among the drummers in the row of chairs on the sidewalk before the Gilmer Hotel, waiting to see what (if anything) the evening would bring, when two of the young bachelors passing in a Model T Ford stopped and invited him to drive across

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the line into the Alabama hills for a gallon of moonshine whisky. Which they did. But the still they sought was not in hills because these were not hills: it was the dying tail of the Appalachian mountain range. But since the Model T's engine had to be running fast anyway for it to have any headlights, going up the mountain was an actual improvement, especially after they had to drop to low gear. And coming from the generation before the motor car, it never occurred to him that coming back down would be any different until they got the gallon and had a drink from it and turned around and started back down. Or maybe it was the whisky, he said, telling it: the little car rushing faster and faster behind a thin wash of light of about the same volume that two lightning bugs would have made, around the plunging curves which, the faster the car ran, became only the more frequent and sharp and plunging, whipping around the nearly right-angle bends with a rock wall on one hand and several hundred feet of vertical and empty night on the other, until at last he prayed; he said: "Lord, You know I haven't worried You in over forty years, and if You'll just get me back to Columbus I promise never to bother You again."

And now the young man, middle-aged now or anyway middle-aging, is back home, too, where they who altered the swamps and forests of his youth have now altered the face of the earth itself; what he remembered as dense river-bottom jungle and rich farmland is now an artificial lake twenty-five miles long: a flood-control project for the cotton fields below the huge earth dam, with a few more outboard-powered fishing skiffs on it each year, and at last a sailboat. On his way into town from his home the middle-aging man (now a professional fiction writer: who had wanted to remain the tramp and the possessionless vagabond of his young manhood but time and success and the hardening of his arteries had beaten him) would pass the back yard of a doctor friend whose son was an undergraduate at Harvard. One day the undergraduate stopped him and invited him in and showed him the unfinished hull of a twenty-foot sloop, saying, "When I get her finished, Mr. Bill, I want you to help me sail her." And each time he passed after that, the undergraduate would repeat: "Remember, Mr. Bill, I want you to help me sail her as soon as I get her in the water": to which the middle-aging would answer as always: "Fine, Arthur. Just let me know."

Then one day he came out of the post office: a voice called him from a taxicab, which in small Mississippi towns was any motor car owned by any foot-loose young man who liked to drive, who decreed himself a cabbie as Napoleon decreed himself emperor; in the car with the driver was the undergraduate and a young man whose father had vanished recently somewhere in the West out of the ruins of the bank of which he had been president, and a fourth young man whose type is universal: the town clown, comedian, whose humour is without viciousness and quite often witty and always funny. "She's in the water, Mr. Bill," the undergraduate said. "Are you ready to go now?" And he was, and the sloop was, too; the undergraduate had sewn his own sails on his mother's machine; they worked her out into the lake and got her on course all tight and drawing, when suddenly it seemed to the middle-aging that part of him was no longer in the sloop but about ten feet away, looking at what he saw: a Harvard undergraduate, a taxi driver, the son of an absconded banker and a village clown and a middle-aged novelist sailing a home-made boat on an artificial lake in the depths of the north Mississippi hills: and he thought that that was something which did not happen to you more than once in your life.

Home again, his native land; he was born of it and his bones will sleep in it; loving it even while hating some of it: the river jungle and the bordering hills where, still a child, he had ridden behind his father on the horse after the bobcat or fox or coon or whatever was ahead of the belling hounds, and where he had hunted alone when he got big enough to be trusted with a gun—all this now the bottom of a muddy lake being raised gradually and steadily every year by another layer of beer cans and bottle caps and lost bass plugs. And the wilderness, the two weeks in the woods, in camp, the rough food and the rough sleeping, the life of men and horses and hounds among men and

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horses and hounds, not to slay the game but to pursue it, touch and let go, never satiety—moved now even further away than that down the flat Delta so that the mile-long freight trains, visible for miles across the fields where the cotton is mortgaged in February, planted in May, harvested in September and put into the Farm Loan in October in order to pay off February's mortgage in order to mortgage next year's crop, seem to be passing two or even three of the little Indian-named hamlets at once over the very ground where, a youth now capable of being trusted even with a rifle, he had shared in the yearly ritual of Old Ben: the big old bear with one trap-ruined foot who had earned for himself a name, a designation like a living man through the legend of the deadfalls and traps he had wrecked and the hounds he had slain and the shots he had survived, until Boon Hogganbeck, the youth's father's stable foreman, ran in and killed it with a hunting knife to save a hound which he, Boon Hogganbeck, loved.

But most of all he hated the intolerance and injustice: the lynching of Negroes not for the crimes they committed but because their skins were black (the lynchings were becoming fewer and fewer and soon there would be no more of them but the evil would have been done and irrevocable because there should never have been any); the inequality: the poor schools they had then when they had any, the hovels they had to live in unless they wanted to live outdoors: who could worship the white man's God but not in the white man's church; pay taxes in the white man's courthouse but couldn't vote in it or for it; working by the white man's clock but having to take his pay by the white man's counting (Captain Joe Thoms, a Delta planter though not one of the big ones, who after a bad crop year drew a thousand silver dollars from the bank and called his five tenants one by one into the dining room where two hundred of the dollars were spread carelessly out on the table beneath the lamp, saying: "Well, Jim, that's what we made this year." Then the Negro: "Gret God, Cap'n Joe, is all that mine?" And Captain Thoms: "No, no, just half of it is yours. The other half belongs to me, remember."); the bigotry which could send to Washington some of the Senators and Congressmen we sent there and which could erect in a town no bigger than Jefferson five separate denominations of churches but set aside not one square foot of ground where children could play and old people could sit and watch them.

But he loves it, it is his, remembering: the trying to, having to, stay in bed until the crack of dawn would bring Christmas; and of the other times almost as good as Christmas: of being waked at three o'clock to have breakfast by lamplight in order to drive by surrey into town and the depot to take the morning train for the three or four days in Memphis where he would see automobiles, and the day in 1910 when, twelve years old, he watched John Moissant land a bicycle-wheeled aileronless (you warped the whole wing-tip to bank it or hold it level) Bleriot monoplane on the infield of the Memphis race track and knew forever after that someday he too would have to fly alone; remembering: his first sweetheart, aged eight, plump and honey-haired and demure and named Mary, the two of them sitting side by side on the kitchen steps eating ice cream; and another one, Minnie this time, granddaughter of the old hillman from whom, a man himself now, he bought moonshine whisky, come to town at seventeen to take a job behind the soda counter of the drugstore, watching her virginal and innocent and without self-consciousness pour Coca-Cola syrup into the lifted glass by hooking her thumb through the ring of the jug and swinging it back and up in one unbroken motion on to her horizontal upper arm exactly as he had seen her grandfather pour out whisky from a jug a thousand times.

Even while hating it, because for every Joe Thoms with two hundred silver dollars and every Snopes in a hooded nightshirt, somewhere in Mississippi there was this too: remembering: Ned, born in a cabin in the back yard in 1865, in the time of the middle-aged's great-grandfather, and who had outlived three generations of them, who had not only walked and talked so constantly for so many years with the three generations that he walked and talked like them, he had two tremendous trunks filled

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with the clothes which they had worn—not only the blue brass-buttoned frock coat and the plug hat in which he had been the great-grandfather's and the grandfather's coachman, but the broadcloth frock coats which the great-grandfather himself had worn, and the pigeon-tailed ones of the grandfather's time and the short coat of his father's which the middle-aged could remember on the backs for which they had been tailored, along with the hats in their eighty years of mutation too: so that, glancing idly up and out the library window, the middle-aged would see that back, that stride, that coat and hat going down the drive towards the road, and his heart would stop and even turn over. He (Ned) was eighty-four now and in these last few years he had begun to get a little mixed up, calling the middle-aged not only Master but sometimes Master Murry, who was the middle-aged's father, and Colonel too, coming once a week through the kitchen and into the parlour, saying: "Here's where I wants to lay, right here where I can be facing out that window. And I wants it to be a sunny day, so the sun can come in on me. And I wants you to preach the sermon. I wants you to take a dram of whisky for me, and lay yourself back and preach the best sermon you ever preached."

And Caroline too, whom the middle-aged had inherited too in his hierarchal turn, nobody knowing any more exactly how many more years than a hundred she was. But not mixed up, she: who had forgotten nothing, calling the middle-aged "Memmy" still, from fifty-odd years ago when that was as close as his brothers could come to "William"; his youngest daughter, aged four and five and six, coming in to the house and saying, "Pappy, Mammy said to tell you not to forget you owe her eighty-nine dollars."

"I won't," the middle-aged would say. "What are you all doing now?"

"Piecing a quilt," the daughter answered. Which they were. There was electricity in her cabin now, but she would not use it, insisting still on the kerosene lamps which she had always known. Nor would she use the spectacles either, wearing them merely as an ornament across the brow of the immaculate white cloth—head-rag—which bound her now hairless head. She did not need them: a smoulder of wood ashes on the hearth winter and summer in which sweet potatoes roasted, the five-year-old white child in a miniature rocking chair at one side of it and the aged Negress, not a great deal larger, in her chair at the other, the basket bright with scraps and fragments of cloth between them and in that dim light in which the middle-aged himself could not have read his own name without his glasses, the two of them with infinitesimal and tedious and patient stitches annealing the bright stars and squares and diamonds into another pattern to be folded away among the cedar shavings in the trunk.

Then it was the Fourth of July, the kitchen was closed after breakfast so the cook and houseman could attend a big picnic; in the middle of the hot morning the aged Negress and the white child gathered green tomatoes from the garden and ate them with salt, and that afternoon beneath the mulberry tree in the back yard the two of them ate most of a fifteen-pound chilled watermelon, and that night Caroline had the first stroke. It should have been the last, the doctor thought so too. But by daylight she had rallied, and that morning the generations of her loins began to arrive, from her own seventy- and eighty-year-old children, down through their great- and twice-great-grandchildren, faces which the middle-aged had never seen before, until the cabin would no longer hold them: the women and girls sleeping on the floor inside and the men and boys sleeping on the ground in front of it, Caroline herself conscious now and presently sitting up in bed: who had forgotten nothing: matriarchal and imperial, and more: imperious: ten and even eleven o'clock at night and the middle-aged himself undressed and in bed, reading, when sure enough he would hear the slow quiet stockinged or naked feet mounting the back stairs; presently the strange dark face—never the same one of two nights ago or the two or three nights before that—would look in the door at him, and the quiet, courteous, never servile voice would say: "She want the ice cream." And he would rise and dress and drive in to the village; he would even drive through the village although he knew that everything

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there would have long been closed and he would do what he had done two nights ago; drive thirty miles on to the arterial highway and then up or down it until he found an open drive-in or hot-dog stand to sell him the quart of ice cream.

But that stroke was not the one; she was walking again presently, even, despite the houseman's standing order to forestall her with the automobile, all the way into town to sit with his, the middle-aging's, mother, talking, he liked to think, of the old days of his father and himself and the three younger brothers, the two of them, two women who together had never weighed two hundred pounds, in a house roaring with five men: though they probably didn't, since women, unlike men, have learned how to live uncomplicated by that sort of sentimentality. But it was as if she knew herself that the summer's stroke was like the throat-clearing sound inside the grandfather clock preceding the stroke of midnight or of noon, because she never touched the last unfinished quilt again. Presently it had vanished, no one knew where, and as the cold came and the shortening days she began to spend more and more time in the house, not her cabin but the big house, sitting in a corner of the kitchen while the cook and houseman were about, then in the middle-aging's wife's sewing room until the family gathered for the evening meal, the houseman carrying her rocking chair into the dining-room to sit there while they ate: until suddenly (it was almost Christmas now) she insisted on sitting in the parlor until the meal was ready, none knew why, until at last she told them, through the wife: "Miss Hestelle, when them niggers lays me out, I want you to make me a fresh clean cap and apron to lay in." That was her valedictory; two days after Christmas the stroke came which was the one; two days after that she lay in the parlor in the fresh cap and apron she would not see, and the middle-aging did indeed lay back and preach the sermon, the oration, hoping that when his turn came there would be someone in the world to owe him the sermon owed to her by all who had been, as he had been from infancy, within the scope and range of that fidelity and that devotion and that rectitude.

Loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you don't love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults.

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P. G. Wodehouse

Berlin Broadcasts (I)

[Extract from a letter to the Editors by P. G. Wodehouse:—The idea of finally seeing my five Berlin broadcasts in print appeals to me. You would have thought that by this time, taking into consideration the fact that I am on excellent terms with the British, French, and American Governments, and that the B.B.C. and I are like Héloïse and Abélard, people would have realised that there could not have been anything very subversive in them. But not so. There was a review of a recent book of mine in one of the papers over here (i.e., the U.S.A.) which began:—

> Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, whom Sinclair Lewis once described as "master of the touchingly inane," is in midseason form this time. These ten short stories, gathered together under the title of *Nothing Serious*, are just what the doctor ordered for that great multitude of admirers on both sides of the Atlantic who for more than a generation have got the sheerest delight from a Wodehouseian humour that is something apart from any other fun-writing in the literature. [*Yes, I know. Fine so far. Couldn't be better. Puts in a nutshell just what I was thinking myself. But get the next paragraph.*]
>
> Gone are the memories of the nightmare which was visited upon him in World War II, when his Nazi captors persuaded him to broadcast from his Upper Silesian prison appeals to his British countrymen to surrender to the Madman of Berchtesgaden.

Twelve years ago, when I was a slip of a boy of sixty, a crack like that would have cut me to the quick, but one advantage of being a septuagenarian is that you don't cut easy. When there is so little time left and one may cease ticking over at any moment, it seems silly to worry about anything. Nowadays I'm like the fellow who said he didn't much mind what people wrote about him in the papers, so long as they spelled the name right.

Still, if that is the story that is going the round of the clubs, it might be as well to print the broadcasts just for the record.]

I

IF anyone listening to me seems to detect in my remarks a slight goofiness, the matter, as Bertie Wooster would say, is susceptible of a ready explanation. I have just emerged from a forty-nine weeks' sojourn in a German prison camp for civil internees, what is technically known as an Ilag, and the old bean is not the bean it was.

An Ilag, by the way, must not be confused with an Oflag or a Stalag. An Oflag is where captured officers go. Stalags are reserved for N.C.O.'s and privates. The civil internee gets the Ilag. But whether you call the Lag an Off, a Sta or an I, it makes no difference. Slice it where you like, it is still a German prison camp.

Young men starting out in life have often asked me, "How can I become an internee?" Well, there are several ways. You can be a grocer at Douai or a farm labourer at Ambricourt or a coal miner at Lille. You can be one of the crew of a liner which has been sunk by enemy destroyers. You can be a War Graves gardener in the War Cemeteries of France. Or, like me, you can settle down in a villa at Le Touquet and get stuck there till the place is

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occupied. That is as simple a method as any. You buy the villa, and the Germans do the rest.

One's reactions on finding oneself suddenly surrounded by the armed strength of a hostile power are rather interesting. The first time you see a German soldier in your garden, your impulse is to jump ten feet straight up into the air, and you do so. But this feeling of embarrassment soon passes. A week later you find you are only jumping five feet. And in the end familiarity so breeds indifference that you are able to sustain without a tremor the spectacle of men in steel helmets riding round your lawn on bicycles and even the discovery that two or three of them have dropped in and are taking a bath in your bathroom. The motto of the German army in occupied territory is "What's yours is mine," and any nonsense about an Englishman's home being his castle is soon dispelled.

FROM the moment when the first German soldier appeared in Le Touquet, I had devoted considerable thought to the subject of internment. In the early days of the occupation it had seemed like Today's Safety Bet. Then, as the weeks went by and nothing happened, optimism began to steal back, for it seemed so obvious that if the German head men had any intention of cracking down, they would have done it long before this. And then, one lovely Sunday morning, the morning of June 21st, I went down to the Kommandatur in Paris Plage to report as usual, and as I reached it I saw one of our little company coming along. And instantly the old stomach did a double buck-and-wing and the heart started beating like a trap drum.

He was carrying a suitcase.

Well, there might, I suppose, have been a dozen reasons for a British resident of Paris Plage carrying a suitcase, but I was able to think of only one. What made the spectacle so immediately sinister was that this man ought not to have been there at all. For some reason which I cannot recall, I think because he was working on a job somewhere, he had been allowed to report an hour earlier than the rest of us and until today had not been present at our gatherings. It struck me instantly, as it would have struck Hercule Poirot, that he must have rolled up at eleven, been informed that the internment order had gone out and been sent home to pack his things and return to the tryst.

Algy, of Algy's Bar, came up and found me gulping.

"Lovely morning," said Algy. "The lark's on the wing, the snail's on the thorn, God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world, don't you think?"

"No, Algy," I replied hollowly, "I do not. Look at Harold."

"Coo! He's got a suitcase!"

"He's got a suitcase," I said. "I fear the worst."

A few moments later my apprehensions were fulfilled. Entering the Kommandatur, I found it in a state of bustle and excitement. I said, "*Es ist schönus wetter,*" once or twice, trying to make the party go, but nobody took any notice. And presently the interpreter stepped forward and announced that the curse had come upon us and that we were for it.

It was a pretty nasty shock, even though I had been expecting it, and it is not too much to say that for an instant I shook from base to apex like a jelly in an earthquake. My emotions, I suppose, were very much those of the man in the dock when the Judge, reaching for the black cap, begins, "Well, prisoner at the bar, it's been nice knowing you. . . ." The room swam before my eyes. I seemed to be surrounded by German soldiers, all doing the shimmy.

It was the horrible finality of the thing which was so unnerving. The situation which had arisen was so obviously one that could not be handled by means of a telegram of regret at the last moment.

IT MIGHT have consoled me a little had I been aware that though Fate had dealt me a shrewd buffet I was a good deal luckier than other victims of the drag-net. Why it should have been so I have never been able to understand, but an unusual leniency was shown to the British citizens of Paris Plage, who were picked up a week later than those in other

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spots along the coast. In Boulogne, for instance, the British residents had been living for nine days in the Petit Vitesse railway station, about the last place in the world, I gathered from their accounts when I met them, where one would wish to live for even nine hours.

We, for some reason, were allowed to go home and put a few things together. And as my home was three kilometres away and an early start desired, I was actually sent there in a car.

It took a little of the edge off the uplifted mood caused by this luxury to discover on arriving that the soldier who was escorting me expected me to make it snappy. My idea had been to have a cold shower and a change and then light a pipe and sit down and muse for awhile, deciding in a calm and unhurried spirit what to take and what could be left behind. His seemed to be that five minutes was ample.

Eventually we compromised on ten.

I would like my biographers to make careful note of the fact that the very first thought that occurred to me was that here was my big chance to buckle down and read the Complete Works of William Shakespeare. Reading the Complete Works of William Shakespeare was a thing I had been meaning to do any time these last forty years, and about three years previously I had bought the Oxford edition for that purpose. But you know how it is. Just as you have got Hamlet and Macbeth under your belt, and are preparing to read the stuffing out of Henry the Sixth, parts one, two, and three, something of Agatha Christie's catches your eye and you weaken.

I did not know what internment implied—it might be for years, or it might be a mere matter of weeks—but the whole situation seemed to point to the Complete Works of William Shakespeare, so in they went.

I am happy to say that I am now crammed with Shakespeare to the brim, so whatever else internment has done for me, I am, at any rate, that much ahead of the game.

I wonder what my listeners would have packed in my place, always remembering that there was an excitable German soldier with a bayonet behind me all the time, confusing my thought processes by shouting "*Schnell!*" It is extraordinary how that sort of thing puts you off. One of my fellow internees told me that in similar circumstances all he could think of to put in his valise was a sponge and a Latin Grammar.

I did better than that. I put in tobacco, pencils, scribbling pads, pipes, a pair of shoes, a razor, some soap, some drawers, a sweater, a couple of cardigans, six pairs of socks, Tennyson's poems, half a pound of tea, and, of course, the Complete Works of William Shakespeare. My wife donated a cold mutton chop and a slab of chocolate. She wanted to add a pound of butter, but I rejected this. There are practically no limits to what a pound of butter can do in warm weather in a small suitcase.

In the end, the only thing of importance I left behind was my passport, which was the thing I ought to have packed first. The internee is always being told to show his passport, and if he has not got one, the authorities tend to look squiggle-eyed. I had never really appreciated what class distinctions can be till I became an internee without a passport, thereby achieving a social position somewhere in between a wharf rat and the man the police have detained for questioning in connection with the smash-and-grab raid.

Having closed the suitcase and grabbed a raincoat and said goodbye to my wife, I was driven back to the Kommandatur, where, of course, I found that I could have taken an hour and a half over my packing and still been in time to be Queen of the May. It was not till nearly two o'clock that together with the rest of the gang, numbering twelve in all, I drove off in a motor omnibus for an unknown destination.

THAT is one of the drawbacks to travelling when you are an internee. Your destination always is unknown. A little more of the spirit of confidence and a frank pooling of information would do much to brighten the internee's lot. It is unsettling when you start out not to have the slightest idea whether you are going half-way across Europe or just to the next town.

Actually, we were headed for Loos, a suburb

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of Lille, a distance of about seventy miles. What with stopping at various points along the road to pick up other foundation members, the journey took seven hours.

An internee's enjoyment of the process of being taken for a ride depends very largely on the mental attitude of the sergeant in charge. Ours fortunately turned out to be in holiday mood. He sang a good deal, gave us cigarettes and let us get off and buy red wine at all stops, infusing into the expedition something of the pleasant atmosphere of a school treat.

One thing which helped to keep the pecker up during the journey was the fact that we all knew each other pretty intimately. Three of us were from the golf club: Arthur Grant, the pro, Jeff, the starter, and Max, the caddy-master. Algy of Algy's Bar in the Rue St. Jean was there, and Alfred of Alfred's Bar in the Rue de Paris. So were ex-Regimental Sergeant-Major Moore, and a couple of supplementary Moores, and the rest, like Jock Monaghan, the bank manager, and Charlie Webb and Bill Illidge, who ran garages, were all well-known Paris Plage figures.

So, what with the jolly society and the red wine, we were all in much more buoyant mood than might have been expected. But it would be exaggerating to say that we were absolutely rollicking. As the evening shadows began to fall and the effects of the red wine began to wear off, we gradually became conscious of a certain sinking feeling. It was borne in on us that we were very far from our snug homes and getting farther all the time, and we were not at all sure that we liked the shape of things to come.

What exactly was the shape of things to come nobody seemed to know. This was the first time we had been interned, and we had no data. By and large, there was a good deal of speculation on the point.

Algy, the human sunbeam, refused to be downhearted. He pictured a bright and attractive future. We should, he said, be housed in villas somewhere. . . .

Villas, Algy?

That's right. Villas.

With honeysuckle climbing over the porch?

Well, he was not quite sure about that. There might or might not be honeysuckle. It all depended. But they would put us in villas, and we would be asked to give our parole, and after that we would be allowed to saunter as we pleased about the countryside. We might even get a bit of fishing.

The picture he drew cheered us up enormously, for a time. We felt that villas would be fine. We looked forward to the fishing. Those of us who were not fond of fishing said they would be quite all right just pottering about in the sunshine.

The reaction set in when we suddenly realised, after expanding like watered flowers, that Algy didn't know a thing about it and was almost certainly talking through the back of his neck. Why villas, we began to ask. If the Germans wanted to see us living in villas, why would they go to all the trouble of removing us from the villas we were in, and putting us in a lot of other villas?

After that we definitely sagged. Uneasiness took the place of optimism. And our spirits hit a new low when, having passed through Lille, we turned up a side lane and came to a halt outside a forbidding-looking building which was only too evidently the local hoose-gow or calaboose.

A man in the uniform of the French provincial police flung wide the gates, and we rolled through.

2

I ENDED my previous talk with the Rover Boys entering Loos prison. For the benefit of those who have still to serve their first sentence in the penitentiary, I may begin by saying that it is quite easy to get into these establishments. You just walk up and register at the desk. It is rather like booking a room at a hotel, except that there are no potted palms in the lobby and you carry your own baggage and don't have to tip the bellboy.

Owing to having led a blameless life since infancy, I had never seen the interior of a prison except in the pictures, and directly I set eyes on the official in the reception bureau I regretted that I was doing so now. There are

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moments, as we pass through life, when we gaze into a stranger's face and say to ourselves "I have met a friend." This was not one of those moments. There is probably nothing in the world less elfin than a French prison chef, and the one twirling a cavalry moustache at me now looked like something out of a film about Devil's Island.

Still, an author never quite gives up hope, and I think there was just a faint idea at the back of my mind that mine host, on hearing my name, would start to his feet with a cry of "*Quoi? Monsieur VODEHOUSE? Embrassez-moi, maître!*" and offer me his bed for the night, adding that he had long been one of my warmest admirers and would I give his little daughter my autograph?

Nothing like this happened. He just twirled the moustache again, entered my name in a large book—or rather he put down "Wid-horse,"—with the words "*Crime . . . Anglais*" after it, and motioned to the bashi-bazouks to lead me to my cell. Or, as it turned out, the communal cell of myself, Algy of Algy's Bar, and William Cartmell, our courteous and popular piano tuner. For in those piping times of war—I don't know how it is on ordinary occasions—Loos Prison was bedding its guests out three to the room.

They had given us Number 44 on the ground floor, and we went there by way of a long corridor roofed in with blue glass. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say partially roofed in with blue glass. For it was evident at a glance that the Loos Calaboose was not the place it had been. Shrapnel had recently been falling on it in rather large quantities, and the roof was mainly holes. From these glass was still descending at intervals, and it was necessary, if one disliked having broken glass falling on one, to sidle along close to the wall.

It was now nearly ten o'clock, and it was this, I discovered later, that saved us a lot of unpleasantness. Round about the hour of ten the French prison official slackens up a bit. He likes to get into something loose, and relax over a good book, and this makes him go through the motions of housing a batch of prisoners quickly and perfunctorily. It also helps to lend speed and zip to his movements when he knows that if he dallies, a great chunk of glass is liable to drop on his head.

It was clear from the first that the sooner our escort were out of that corridor, the better they would be pleased. Their minds were not on their job. You saw their eyes swivelling up to the roof and every time there was a musical tinkle as another half pound of glass descended they started nervously and fanned themselves with the prison Regulations.

When I got into the exercise yard next morning and met the men who had been in the place a week, I found that they on arrival had been stood with their faces to the wall, stripped to their mesh-knit underclothing, deprived of their belongings and generally made to feel like so many imprisoned pieces of cheese. All they did to us was take away our knives and push us into our cell and leave us.

CELLS in French prisons are built for privacy. Where in the Big House of the motion pictures there are bars, here you have only a wall with an iron-studded door in it. There is a small panel in the middle of this door through which food comes, and in the middle of the panel a tiny peephole covered with a flap of steel. When our meals were brought, we used to push up this flap, so that we could obtain at least a limited view of the great world outside. Little things make one happy in prison. When the warder discovered this, he rebuked us warmly. He said we should get him shot, which for some reason inscrutable to us he seemed to think would be a pity.

When you go through the iron-studded door, it is slammed and locked behind you, and you find yourself in a snug little apartment measuring twelve feet by eight. At the far end is a window and under it a bed. Against the opposite wall there stands a small table and chained to it a chair of the type designed for the use of Singer's Midgets. In the corner by the door is a tap with a basin the size of a saucer under it, and beyond that what Chic Sale in his famous book, *The Specialist*, calls "a family one-holer." There is also an oak shelf and a wooden hook.

The décor is in the stark modern style. The only pictures on the walls, which are of white-

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washed stone, are those drawn from time to time by French convicts, boldly executed pencil sketches very much in the vein which you would expect from French convicts, whose mental trend is seldom or never prudish. Most of those in Number 44 had been executed by an artist signing himself "*Simon le Kid de Metz*." His line work was firm and good. The general effect was like finding oneself enclosed in a bound volume of *La Vie Parisienne*.

Cartmell being the senior member of our trio, we gave him the bed, and Algy and I turned in on the floor. It was the first time I had tried dossing on a granite floor, but the adventures of the day had left me fatigued and it was not long before the tired eyelids closed in sleep. My last waking thought, I remember, was that while this was a hell of a thing to have happened to a respectable old gentleman in his declining years, it was all pretty darned interesting, and I could hardly wait to see what the morrow would bring forth.

WHAT the morrow brought forth, at seven sharp, was the ringing of a bell in the corridor and the rattling of keys in the lock and the opening of the small panel which I mentioned. Through this were thrust three tin mugs containing a thin and lukewarm soup and three loaves of bread, sepia in colour. This, one gathered, was breakfast, and the problem arose of how to play our part in the festivities.

The soup was all right. One could manage that. You just took a swig, and then another swig to see if it had really tasted as peculiar as it had seemed to be the first time, and before you knew where you were it had gone. But how, not having knives, we were to deal with the bread presented a sterner test for our ingenuity. Chewing bits off it was not a practical proposition for my cell mates, whose teeth had gone back on them when they were boys, and it was no good hammering it on the table, because it simply chipped the woodwork.

But there is always a way of getting round life's little difficulties, if you give your mind to it. I became bread-biter to the community, and I think I gave satisfaction. At any rate, I got the stuff apart. The trick is to get your head tilted at just the right angle and to let the upper canine do the heavy work.

At eight-thirty the key rattled again, and we were let out for air, recreation, and exercise. That is to say, we were taken to an enclosure with high brick walls, partially open to the sky, and allowed to stand there for half an hour.

There was nothing much we could do except stand, for the enclosure, constructed, apparently, by an architect who had seen the Black Hole of Calcutta and admired it, was about twelve feet at the broad end, tapering off to five at the narrow end, and we had to share it with the occupants of other cells. No chance, I mean, of getting up an informal football game or a cross-country run or anything of that sort.

Having stood for thirty minutes, we returned to our cells, greatly invigorated, and remained there for the next twenty-three and a half hours. At twelve we got some soup, and at five some more soup. Into the midday ration a cabbage had been dipped—hastily, by a cook who didn't like getting his hands wet—and in the other there was a bean actually floating about, like the corpse of a coolie on the sluggish tide of some Indian river. And I had to do some more bread-biting.

I have sometimes wondered how my obituary will read. If the man who is given the job of writing it has any sense of fairness, he will at least say "He could bite bread." I am prepared to back myself for money, notes, or lima beans to bite bread against any man in Great Britain or the United States of America. And this does not exclude professional sword-swallowers.

AFTER the delivery of the five o'clock banquet—just a black tie, of course, nothing formal—we saw no more of the warders till next morning, and were thrown back for entertainment on our own resources. One of the things we did in Cell 44 was to tap the hours on the wall with a tin mug for the benefit of our next-door neighbours.

Next day the key rattled in the lock at seven and we got soup, and at eight-thirty we had our scamper in the great open spaces, followed

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by soup at twelve and more soup at five. The day after that the key rattled in the lock at seven and we . . . But you have got the idea. What you would call a healthy, regular life, lacking perhaps some of the fiercer excitements but giving a man plenty of leisure for reading the Complete Works of William Shakespeare, as, if you remember, I had resolved to do.

Apart from Shakespeare and the conversation of Bill and Algy, what made existence in Cell 44 tolerable was the fact that we had a splendid window.

I had always understood that prison cells were fitted with small windows of ground glass, placed high up near the ceiling, and ours came as an agreeable surprise. It was a spacious affair of about five feet by four, and you could open it wide and even, by standing on the bed, get a glimpse from it of a vegetable garden and fields beyond. And the air that came through was invaluable in keeping our cell smell within reasonable bounds.

The cell smell (or stink) is a great feature of all French prisons. Ours in Number 44 at Loos was one of those strapping, broad-shouldered, up-and-coming young stenches which stand with both feet on the ground and look the world in the eye. We became very fond and proud of it, championing it hotly against other prisoners who claimed that theirs had more authority and bouquet. And when the first German officer to enter our little sanctum rocked back on his heels and staggered out, we took it almost as a personal compliment. It was like hearing a tribute paid to an old friend.

NEVERTHELESS, in spite of the fascination of hob-nobbing with our smell and trying to think of all the things it reminded one of, we did find time hang a little heavy on our hands now and then. I was all right, of course—I had my Complete Works of William Shakespeare. But Algy had no drinks to mix and Cartmell no pianos to tune, and a piano-tuner suddenly deprived of pianos is like a tiger whose medical adviser has put it on a vegetarian diet.

It was on the fourth morning, accordingly, that we addressed a petition to the German Kommandant, pointing out that as we were civil internees, not convicts, there was surely no need of all this Ballad of Reading Gaol stuff. Careful not to hurt his feelings, we said we liked this little cell of his enormously, but that twenty-three and a half hours of it daily was a bit too much. Would it not be possible, we asked, without upsetting anybody's arrangements, to inject a little more variety into our lives?

This appeal to Cæsar worked like magic. It was not long after we had sent it off that there came the old, familiar rattle of keys and the warders opened the doors, and informed us that from now on we were at liberty to roam about the prison at will.

Everything in this world is relative, as somebody once said, probably Shakespeare in his Complete Works, and I cannot remember when I have experienced such a glorious sense of freedom as when I strolled out of Number 44, leaving the door open behind me, and started to saunter up and down outside. I felt like Shelley's skylark. If Shelley had seen me at that moment, he would have said "Hail to thee, blithe spirit," and he would have meant it.

And even if it shows mine to be a vindictive nature, I must confess that the pleasure was enhanced by the sight of the horror and anguish on the faces of the prison personnel. If there is one man who is a stickler for tradition and etiquette, for what is done and what is not done, it is the French prison warder, and here were tradition and etiquette being chucked straight into the ash can and nothing to be done about it. I suppose their feelings must have been rather like what those of a golf-club secretary would be if he had to submit to watching people dancing on his putting greens in high-heeled shoes.

In the end we got quite sorry for the poor chaps and relented to the extent of allowing them to lock us in for the night. It was pathetic to see how they brightened up at this concession. It paved the way to an understanding, and before we left the place, we had come to be on quite friendly terms. One of them actually unbent so far as to show us the condemned cells, much as a host at a country house takes his guests round the stables.

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An added attraction of the new régime was that we were now able to extend our circle of friends—in short, to get around and meet the boys. Our great topic of conversation, as we strolled about the corridors, was, of course, where we were going from here, and when. For we could not believe that Loos prison was anything but a temporary resting place. And we were right. A week after we had arrived we were lined up in the corridor, and presently the Kommandant appeared and we were told that after our papers had been examined we were to pack and be ready to leave.

Men of sixty and over, the Kommandant added, would be released and sent home, so Bill Cartmell and the others of that age went and stood to one side, looking like a beauty chorus. On the strength of being fifty-eight and three-quarters, I attempted to join them, but was headed back. Fifty-eight and three-quarters, I was given to understand, was good, but not good enough.

I did not brood about this very much, however, for it had just occurred to me that, having no passport, I might have to stay on after the others had gone, wherever they were going. And the thought of lingering on indefinitely in Loos Prison, possibly till I had grown a long white beard and acquired a tame mouse, was not a pleasant one. Fortunately, I had twelve stout fellows from Paris Plage to testify to my identity and respectability, and they all lined up beside me and testified. The Kommandant was plainly staggered by this cloud of witnesses. The hard, suspicious look faded from his eye, and in the end I just got under the wire.

At eleven o'clock next morning we were given our midday soup and hustled out and dumped into vans and driven to the station.

From the breathless bustle and fevered activity of the proceedings one might have supposed that the train was due to leave at about eleven-thirty, but this was not the case. Our Kommandant was a careful man. I think he must once have missed an important train, and it had preyed on his mind and created a complex. At any rate, he got us to the station at 11.40 a.m. and the journey actually started at eight o'clock in the evening.

One can picture the interview between him and the Sergeant when the latter returned.

"Did those boys catch that train all right?"

"Yes, sir. By eight hours and twenty minutes."

"Whew! Close thing. Mustn't run it so fine another time."

As a matter of fact, all through my career as an internee I noticed this tendency on the part of the Germans to start our little expeditions off with a whoop and a holler and then sort of lose interest. It reminded me of Hollywood. When you are engaged to work in Hollywood, you get a cable saying it is absolutely vital that you be at the studio at five minutes to ten on the morning of June the first. Ten o'clock will be too late, and as for five past or getting there on June the second, that means ruin to the film industry.

So you rush about and leap into liners and aeroplanes, and at five minutes to ten on June 1st you are at the studio, being told that you cannot see your employer now, as he has gone to Palm Springs for a month. Nothing happens after that till November the twenty-ninth, when you are given an assignment, and told that every moment is precious.

It is the same with Germans in this matter of catching trains. They like to leave a margin.

Summing up my experiences as a gaol-bird, I would say that a prison is all right for a visit, but I wouldn't live there if you gave me the place. On my part, at any rate, there was no moaning at the bar when we left Loos. I was glad to go. The last I saw of the old Alma Mater was the warder closing the door of the van and standing back with the French equivalent of "Right away."

He said "*Au revoir*" to me, which I thought a little tactless.

(Broadcasts 3, 4, and 5 will appear in the next issue of ENCOUNTER.)

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Christopher Strachey

The "Thinking" Machine

WHEN people discover that my job is concerned with electronic computers, there are two questions they usually ask. The insecure or politically-minded, and those who have read one of Norbert Wiener's books, usually want to know how long it will be before these machines take over their jobs. The others want to know how far machines can actually think, either because they want to marvel at them or because they need to be reassured that in fact no machine can ever really think in the way a human being does. Before we can discuss either of these questions without being actively misleading, it is essential to get a clear idea of what sort of things these computers can do and the way in which they do them.

Electronic computers by themselves are not capable of doing anything at all. They are merely devices which can carry out a long sequence of instructions very rapidly. These instructions, which are known as the program, must specify exactly what the machine is to do in every possible situation it can encounter, for the machine can do nothing which is not laid down for it in its program. Once the program has been written—and ultimately it must be written by a human being—the machine is able to apply the instructions in the program to the data of the problem in hand, even if the process seems fantastically complicated and laborious. It is rather as if all the thought required to solve the problem is concentrated into the program, while the machine is left to do the donkey work. It behaves as if it were a completely obedient and accurate slave who works with incredible speed, but wholly unintelligently.

It is important to realise that the machine can exercise no judgement at all on its own initiative, so that it is perfectly happy to put out quite ludicrous answers. If, for example, it is calculating weekly wages and there is a mistake of some sort in the figure it reads for the number of hours worked, the result may be an obviously absurd wage—such as fourpence or four million pounds. A human being getting this sort of answer would immediately suspect an error and would stop to investigate, but the machine will be quite content with any answer at all unless the program specially instructs it to reject answers which are obviously silly. And, moreover, in order to do this the program has to specify in detail what makes an answer obviously silly. In this particular case, the sort of test which might be included would be to verify that the wage lies between certain limits, say one pound to twenty pounds; another possible test for a "reasonable" wage is that it does not differ too much from last week's wage for the same man, but in this case a special provision would have to be made for the first time a man is paid, as there would otherwise be nothing to compare with.

It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of the program; without it a computer is like a typewriter without a typist or a piano without a pianist. With this in mind it becomes clear that all our questions about what a computer can do need to be rephrased. The proper question to ask is not "can a computer do this?", but "can we write a

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program to make a computer do this?", and this is really a very different sort of question because the writing of programs (most unfortunately known as "programming" in the trade) is still an essentially human activity.

WRITING a program to make a computer solve a particular problem falls into two stages. The first and most difficult of these involves no technical knowledge of the functioning of a computer beyond the fact that it must have a completely detailed program. In this stage we have to produce a set of rules which we know will lead to the required answer in every possible case. The second stage consists of transforming these rules into a precise set of instructions in a form suitable for the computer. This stage is much less difficult (and much less interesting) than the first and it obviously involves a considerable technical knowledge of the machine to be used.

It might appear from all this that the need to have a detailed program meant that the machine could never produce any results which were unexpected or new, or indeed anything which was not rather obviously trivial. This however is not the case. One of the most interesting facts brought out by the attempts to make computers imitate human methods of thought is that a great deal of what is usually known as thinking can in fact be reduced to a relatively simple set of rules of the type which can be incorporated into a program. Simple games such as noughts and crosses present no difficulty and programs exist which make the computer invincible in such games. Chess, so far as I know, has never actually been programmed for a computer, but a program exists for the machine at Manchester University which will make it play quite a tolerable game of draughts, and the same machine has also written quite a number of unmistakable love letters. Several programs have been written which allow a computer to learn in a limited sense, and it should be quite possible to get one to do a simple type of intelligence test and to do fairly well at it.

Put baldly like this, with no explanation of the way in which they work, these programs can very easily give the impression that computers can "think." They are, of course, the most spectacular examples and ones which are easily understood by laymen. As a consequence they get much more publicity—and generally very inaccurate publicity at that—than perhaps they deserve. In fact they are unlike most of the problems put to computers as they are primarily non-mathematical in aim. They are, however, relevant to the problem of whether machines can think, so I shall describe two of them in outline to give some idea of the way in which they work.

IN SPITE of a certain impression of rather Victorian Babu, I think there is very little doubt of the intention of these letters:

Darling Sweetheart

You are my avid fellow feeling. My affection curiously clings to your passionate wish. My liking yearns for your heart. You are my wistful sympathy: my tender liking.

Yours beautifully
M. U. C.

Honey Dear

My sympathetic affection beautifully attracts your affectionate enthusiasm. You are my loving adoration: my breathless adoration. My fellow feeling breathlessly hopes for your dear eagerness. My lovesick adoration cherishes your avid ardour.

Yours wistfully
M. U. C.

The Manchester University Computer (hence the irreverent signature) can type out letters like this at the rate of about one a minute for hours without ever repeating itself. The scheme on which it works, however, is almost childishly simple. Apart from the beginning and the ending of the letters, there are only two basic types of sentence. The first is "*My*—— (adj.) —— (noun) —— (adv.) —— (verb) *your* —— (adj.) —— (noun)." There are lists of appropriate adjectives, nouns, adverbs, and verbs from which the blanks are filled in at random. There is also a further random choice as to whether or not the adjectives and adverb are included at all. The second type is simply "*You are my* —— (adj.) —— (noun)," and in

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this case the adjective is always present. There is a random choice of which type of sentence is to be used, but if there are two consecutive sentences of the second type, the first ends with a colon (unfortunately the teleprinter of the computer had no comma) and the initial "*You are*" of the second is omitted. The letter starts with two words chosen from special lists; there are then five sentences of one of the two basic types, and the letter ends "*Yours* —— (adv.) M. U. C."

There are many obvious imperfections in this scheme (indeed very little thought went into its devising) and the fact that the vocabulary was largely based on Roget's Thesaurus lends a very peculiar flavour to the results. The chief point of interest, however, is not the obvious crudity of the scheme, nor even in ways in which it might be improved, but in the remarkable simplicity of the plan when compared with the diversity of the letters it produces.

It is clear that these letters are produced by a rather simple trick and that the computer is not really "thinking" at all. This is true of all programs which make the computer appear to think; on analysis they are nothing more than rather complicated tricks. However, sometimes these tricks can lead to quite unexpected and interesting results.

AN EXAMPLE of this occurred in the program for playing draughts. Although draughts is a relatively simple game, it has no complete mathematical analysis and there is no way of prescribing the best move in any given situation. It is quite simple to determine all the possible legal moves; the problem is to devise a way of choosing one of these which will allow the machine to play at least a tolerable game. The simplest possible method would be to choose a move at random, but this does not produce a realistic game at all, so a more sophisticated approach is necessary. In the scheme actually used the machine "looks ahead" for a few moves on each side. That is to say that it selects one of its own possible moves, discovers all the legal replies for its opponent, and tries them out one by one. For each combination of its own move and its opponent's reply, it then finds all its own possible second moves and so on. As there are, on an average, about ten legal moves at each stage of the game, the number of moves it has to consider gets very large indeed if it is to look ahead more than a very few steps. After a certain number of these stages (the number being determined by time taken) the machine evaluates the resulting position using a very simple scheme. It notes the value of this position and ultimately chooses the move which leads to the best possible position, always assuming that its opponent makes the best of the possible moves open to him.

The chief limitation of this scheme is the time it takes to examine all the possible moves. The machine can examine about ten moves a second, but the number of moves to be considered increases so rapidly that it is only possible to examine three stages in all (two of its own moves and one of its opponent's) if the process is to be completed in two or three minutes, and this is not enough to allow the machine to play a good game.

This basic move-finding scheme is embedded in a general game-playing program which accepts the opponent's moves, displays the positions, prints the moves, and generally organises the sequence of operations in the game. This program, though basically quite simple, gives a rather spectacular example of anthropomorphic behaviour on the part of a computer. For example it starts by printing "*Please read the instruction card.*" When its human opponent has assimilated the instructions, he presses a key and the machine prints "*Shall we toss for the first move? Will you spin a coin?*" It then calls, in a random manner, and asks "*Have I won?*" When it has been given this information (by means of another key) it either makes the first move itself, or waits for its opponent to do so.

Its opponent has to indicate his moves to the machine by setting certain keys, and if he makes a mistake in doing this, so that the move he indicates is meaningless, the machine will reject it and point out his mistake. If he makes too many mistakes of this kind the remarks printed by the machine will get increasingly

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uncomplimentary and finally it will refuse to waste any more time with him.

There are various other situations in which the machine prints comments (for example if its opponent spends too long in making a move) and the whole behaviour of the machine, though perfectly determinate and simple if you know the rules, appears to the uninitiated as complex and unpredictable. All this, however, though fascinating to watch, is only a quite trivial form of trickery and has no real importance.

There is, however, one feature of the machine's game which was quite unexpected and rather interesting. The way in which the machine values the positions it reaches when looking ahead is extremely crude. It counts each man as one point and each king (being obviously worth more than an ordinary man) as three points; the value of any position is the difference between its own points and its opponent's points. A large number of the positions it examines will, of course, have the same value, and it chooses between these at random.

Suppose now its opponent has a man in the seventh rank so that he is about to make a king in his next move, and the machine is unable to stop him. The machine will effectively lose two points at its opponent's next move, and a human being would realise that this was inevitable and accept this fact. The machine, however, will notice that if it can sacrifice a single piece its opponent must take this at once. This leads to an immediate loss of only one point and, as it is not looking far enough ahead, the machine cannot see that it has not prevented its opponent from kinging but only postponed the evil day. At its next move it will be faced with the same difficulty, which it will try to solve in the same way, so that it will make every possible sacrifice of a single man before it accepts as inevitable the creation of an opponent's king.

This is obviously a fatal flaw in the strategy the machine is using. An opponent who detected this behaviour (and it is extremely conspicuous in play) would only have to leave his man on the point of kinging indefinitely for the machine to sacrifice all its remaining men as soon as the opportunity offered.

THE interesting feature of the behaviour is that it was wholly unexpected. It is quite true that it follows inevitably as a logical consequence of the rules adopted, and that once it has appeared it is easily understood. But this is true of a great many discoveries in the realm of thought and at first sight it appears as if this is a case where the machine has made a genuine, if minor, discovery. But on closer inspection I do not think this is an accurate description. It is true that the machine demonstrated this unexpected behaviour, but it did not make the next and vital step of recognising that the behaviour was either unexpected or interesting. This helps to make clear both the possibilities and the limitations of the way we use computers at present.

It is entirely possible that machines can help us to discover a great many new and interesting ideas. They can work out the consequences of the assumptions built into their programs, and from time to time the results they get will be both unexpected and interesting. But just because they are unexpected we cannot make the computer recognise them when they turn up—for essentially the machine can only look for the sort of thing it has been told to look for.

One of the most difficult processes of thought is the recognition of a relationship between apparently unconnected events. It is a very difficult process even if the relationship is a fairly simple one and its general type is already known—indeed a large number of the questions in intelligence tests are of just this type. I know of no program for a computer which allows it to recognise any general relationship even of a limited type; it always seems to be necessary to specify exactly what is to be looked for. This means that it is wholly beyond us at present to write a program which will allow the computer to recognise an unexpected relationship—one whose existence we had not envisaged.

The problem of deciding if a relationship is interesting or not, once it has been discovered,

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appears to present very little difficulty to a human being, but the mental steps we go through in reaching this sort of value judgement are most obscure. As a result there seems, at the moment, to be no prospect of being able to write a program to make a machine exercise judgement in this sort of way.

At present, then, computers can at the most only provide us with the raw material for new ideas. The final step of recognising the idea itself and realising that it is worth considering at all, has still to be carried out by a human being.

WE ARE now in a rather better position to consider whether or not computers can think. In the first place the question must clearly be recast in the form "Can we write a program to make a computer 'think'?" and in this form it becomes obvious that the answer depends almost entirely on the meaning we attach to the term "think."

A. M. Turing, who was discussing the mathematical limitations of these machines as early as 1936 has suggested an interesting way round the difficulty of defining this question. He points out that most people asking this question are in fact not interested in the answer. They really want to ask the rather different question, "Can a machine think as well as a human being?" He then describes an imitation game which might provide a satisfactory answer to this question. Basically the game is for the computer to try to make its human opponent believe that it is a human being. In order to remove irrelevant considerations, such as its shape, all communication with the machine is to be by a teleprinter. The player is then at liberty to ask the machine any question he likes and, after a suitable interval, a reply comes back over the teleprinter. The problem is for him to decide, from the answers, whether the teleprinter is being operated at the far end by a man or by a machine. The game might go as follows:

Question: Add 17 and 49.
Answer: 66.
Question: Multiply 314159 by itself.
Answer: (after about five minutes) 98696034011 (this is incorrect).
Question: Let's start a game of Chess. 1. P–K4.
Answer: P–K4.
Question: Write me a sonnet.
Answer: Come off it, old man, you know I can't do that sort of thing.
Question: What is your favourite food?
Answer: Strawberries and cream.

If the humanity of the operator was still in doubt after half an hour of this sort of question and answer, it would be impossible to deny that the machine was capable of imitating human thought processes to a very large extent.

No machine at present can play this game at all, but the type of program required is relatively simple (though immensely long) and Turing suggests that in the next ten years or so we shall see machines which can keep half of their opponents in doubt for five minutes. I think this may be a rather optimistic estimate, but I have no doubt that ultimately it will be possible to produce such a machine.

WHEN discussing the effect that computers and similar machines are likely to have on our lives, it is important to distinguish between those limited applications of existing techniques which we can foresee now, whose effects will be apparent in a few years, and the more remote and possibly more far-reaching results of future developments. The American mathematician Norbert Wiener has discussed the latter in two books—*Cybernetics* and *The Human Use of Human Beings*—and he draws an alarming, but I think probably justified picture of the social and economic upheaval that these are likely to produce. In effect he predicts a second Industrial Revolution, with changes at least as sweeping as those caused by the first. I do not propose to discuss this wider and more speculative aspect of the subject in this article, and shall confine myself to those applications of computers which I expect to see in the next few years.

There are two main fields in which these machines are used at present. The first, and the one for which they were originally designed, is in performing long and complicated mathematical calculations for scientific and engineering purposes. This is still probably the principal use of the machines and it is a very important

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one. The effects it produces on the world at large, however, are only indirect. They take the form of bigger and better (or cheaper) aeroplanes, rockets, dams, buildings, and suchlike, or a better understanding of the complexities of nuclear physics or crystal structure. In this field the computer makes it possible to do things which could not be done without them, so that they actually provide more work for human beings.

Since almost all clerical work is done either partly or wholly by hand, and since most of it is either of a completely routine nature or only requires very simple judgements based on fixed rules, this is just the type of work for which it is possible to write a program for a computer. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the second main field for these machines is in business and commerce.

The total volume of accountancy and clerical work done is quite startling. The 1951 census showed that 2,100,000 people in Great Britain were engaged in clerical work of some kind. This is about a tenth of the working population. A great many of these work in very large offices; the Ministry of National Insurance at Newcastle employs over 8,000 in a single building and there are several large firms with over 1,000 clerks. In a small office there is room for a certain amount of individuality and imagination, but if many of the 8,000 clerks in the Ministry of National Insurance started using their imagination they would wreck the whole system completely in a very short time. The operations of a large office have to be planned in as much detail as the mass production lines in a factory. This inevitably means that virtually no freedom of choice is left to the individual clerks, so that they are working more or less automatically according to a plan which has been laid down in advance. But this is precisely what a computer does except that a computer works several hundred times as fast, makes fewer mistakes, doesn't go on strike or stop for a cup of tea or a chat, and generally behaves in a much more satisfactory way. Mechanical and repetitive jobs are done much better and more economically by machines than by human beings—even if they are clerical ones.

THERE are, of course, a number of technical limitations on what a computer can do. There is an interesting difference between the sort of arithmetic done in business and commerce, and the sort of arithmetic done in science and mathematics. Scientific work, in general, involves very complex manipulation of a small amount of data. The machine reads in a few numbers and then proceeds to work away on them for a long time—several seconds, or possibly several minutes. This may not sound a long time, but these machines perform about one thousand operations a second, so that they are working about a thousand times as fast as a man using a small desk machine and perhaps fifty thousand times as fast as a man with only a pencil and paper.

Business arithmetic on the other hand consists almost entirely of doing very few and simple operations with a vast number of separate figures. The chief problem is to assemble all the material required for the calculation in hand, and it often costs more to bring all the relevant figures together than it does to perform the required calculation. This means that if a computer is to do office work efficiently, it must be able to absorb the figures it needs at a very high rate, and this in turn brings up the question of communication between the computer and the outside world.

The basic difficulty is that computers cannot read written or printed information, and, moreover, there is very little prospect of any machine being able to do this for a long time. The whole process of reading is fantastically complicated and we know distressingly little about it. For example we don't even know how the mind is able to recognise an individual letter, which can appear in literally hundreds of shapes and sizes. The whole process of learning to see is a very slow and difficult one, and the visual memory occupies a very large part of the brain.

In order to get information into a computer it is therefore essential to put it in some form that the computer can read. There are several possible forms (such as punched cards, punched paper tape, magnetic tape) each of which has various advantages and disadvantages. The one thing they have in common is that they

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are not our usual method of writing, so that some form of translation is necessary; and this translation still has to be done by a human being.

It might seem that the fact that this translation is necessary nullifies most of the advantages of using a computer for office work, but in fact it is not so serious a disadvantage as it appears at first sight. The reason for this is that nearly all the writing which is done in offices is never used outside the office. Most of the figures that are written by one clerk are merely used at a later stage by another clerk, so that they form a series of intermediate results. If a computer is doing the work of the whole office all these intermediate results can be kept in the form suitable for the computer; there is no need ever to write them in ordinary figures or to translate them back again for the machine. Nearly all the files and records in the office can be treated in this way, and on the other rare occasions when it is essential to translate this information into ordinary writing, the translation can be done automatically by a quite simple machine.

It is therefore entirely technically possible for computers to take over a very large proportion of the work in offices, particularly in large ones. This is the first application of computers which will have an appreciable effect outside scientific laboratories. Already in this country there is one computer doing this sort of work, and in America the process is considerably further advanced. It will, of course, be several years before the full effect of computers is felt, but the process has started, and I think it is quite certain that in five or ten years' time a large proportion of office work will be done by machines.

There are, of course, a great many difficulties of a non-technical kind. The introduction of a computer of this sort involves a complete reorganisation of the office routine, and this is a slow and difficult process. Then again, to get the full benefit of mechanisation it is essential to standardise procedures to a far greater extent than is the case today. This sort of standardisation involves the cooperation of a large number of people with different interests, most of whom have more training in competition than co-operation, so that progress will probably be slow and difficult. But the economic advantages to be gained are so great that this sort of human cussedness can only delay the introduction of computers slightly.

I do not think that the introduction of computers into offices in this way will produce any very marked disturbances. It is true that a very large number of people will ultimately be replaced by these machines—possibly as many as a million in the next ten years—but the process will be a gradual one. Perhaps more important is the fact that there is, in any case, a very large turnover in the clerks they will replace. The majority of these are young women who leave after a few years to get married, so that the introduction of a computer will probably not throw very many people out of work. It will merely stop the intake of new clerks, who will presumably have to seek other occupations. What these will be, is an interesting matter for speculation.

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Arnold J. Toynbee

The Elusiveness of History

HISTORY is elusive. The word itself is as elusive as the things that it means. The original Greek word "historia" meant "an inquiry." It could mean an inquiry about anything in the world, but it came to have the particular meaning of an inquiry into human affairs, and this in a limited usage of these two words. Human nature has a physical aspect, but the word history has never been used to mean the study of the human body. Sciences like anatomy, neurology, physiology, and biology have been excluded from the word "history's" empire. "History" has been restricted to meaning the study of the experiences and actions of human personalities. One might have thought that the word had now been pinned down, but it had not been, after all; for it had no sooner been confined within these limits than it burst its bounds by acquiring an alternative usage. It now came to mean human actions and experiences themselves, besides meaning the study of them, and it went on to widen its meaning still further.

One feature of human experiences and actions is that they are events on the move down a one-way stream of time. But human affairs are not the only things, known to human observers, that move through time along an irreversible course. So history came to mean all movement of this irreversible kind. The Earth's non-human fauna could have a history, its flora could have a history, the solar system could have a history, the whole cosmos could have a history; history need not be something that happened just to mankind or to individual human beings. A thing is in history when it is moving along a time-track on which it cannot turn back; and our modern men of science seem to think that most things in the universe move in this "historical" way, in contrast to Aristotle's view that all the heavenly bodies—from the moon inclusive, outwards, measuring from the Earth as the centre point—move in circular orbits in which each circumgyration is an exact repetition of every one that has preceded it.

So the word "history" has a whole gamut of meanings, and the two extremes seem far apart. At one end history means the study of human affairs, at the other end it means, not a study, but a movement which, so long as it is an irreversible movement down a time-stream, may be a movement of anything in the world.

Is there anything in common between the "subjective" history which is a historian's observation and record and the "objective" history which is the movement that the historian is trying to track down? Well, yes, there is. In the first place, "objective history" and "subjective history" are inseparable. Without an object there can be no inquiry, and, without an inquirer, there can be no object—or, at least, no object can be known to human minds except through some inquirer's observation of it. In the second place, the subject of an historical inquiry is, at the same time, part and parcel of the object that he is studying; for the historian himself, as well as the people or the things that he is observing, is afloat on the stream of time and is all the time being carried, like them, down time's irreversible current.

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This double role of the historian is obvious in the case of, say, Thucydides, who was a combatant in the Great Atheno-Peloponnesian war before he became the great historian of it. Thucydides might never have had a chance of writing his history if he had not had the misfortune to fail in a naval operation in which he was in command on the Athenian side. His countrymen vented their spleen at his failure to save Amphipolis from falling by sending the unfortunate naval commander into exile, and it was in this undesired retreat from public life that Thucydides found the leisure to research and write and the opportunity to address historical inquiries to participants in the war on both sides of the military front. As an historian, Thucydides has given an account of the unsuccessful naval operation that he himself had conducted as a naval officer, and, in this case, no reader can fail to see that the officer-historian has run with the hare besides hunting with the hounds. Thucydides is both object and subject in the history of the naval episode on the River Strymon in the year 424 B.C. But every historian is, like Thucydides, inside the history that he is observing and recording; for, even when an historian is not writing the history of his own time and place, he is writing about human affairs that have happened at some date at some point on the surface of this planet; and he, like the people into whose actions and experiences he is inquiring, is a human being living in the habitable world.

Every historian, in fact, is charting some previous movement down some higher reach of the river on which he himself is being carried; and, though the particular past epoch that he is studying may be relatively near to, or relatively remote from, his own time, this difference is a minor one. In every case, the historian and his objects of study are being carried down the same river by the same current. It will be seen that the historian is in the same plight as the astronomer. Both astronomers and historians have sometimes naïvely assumed that they were observing the movements of stars or people from some fixed point on the bank of time's ever-rolling stream. But an observer in this commanding position would not be part of the human fauna of the Earth; he would be God himself; and no historian or astronomer will have the hardihood to maintain that he commands this God's-eye view. He knows very well that he is caught inextricably in the meshes of relativity. The only view of space-time that he can ever have is one taken from some local and temporary point-moment inside the system that he is trying to observe.

THE historian's view is conditioned, always and everywhere, by his own location in time and place; and, since place and time are continually changing, no history, in the subjective sense of the word, can ever be a permanent record that will tell the story, once for all, in a form that will be equally acceptable to readers in all ages, or even in all quarters of the Earth.

This is why in our Western world, in each successive generation for the last six or seven generations or so, our historians have rewritten the history of the Greeks and Romans. It is not that the Greeks and Romans themselves have changed; they cannot have changed, since they are still just as dead in 1954 as they were in 1854; but, though persistently dead, the Greeks and Romans are never "done with"; each successive generation of their modern successors finds itself still full of curiosity about them, and, since each of these modern generations has been, in its turn, alive and on the move, Greek and Roman history has taken on a different appearance when viewed from each passing modern generation's short-lived standpoint. From this or that point in the modern reach of the time-stream, this or that feature in Greek and Roman history looms up into prominence, while this or that other feature recedes into obscurity. In looking at the past, we cannot jump clear of our own experiences, actions, passions, and prejudices. These cannot (we may suppose) affect the always elusive past-in-itself; but they do decide which of the many possible alternative partial glimpses of the past shall be visible to us, just here and just now.

One of the greatest modern historians of Greece and Rome in the last generation was Michael Rostovtzeff, a "White" Russian exile who ended his days in the United States and wrote his two greatest works there. Rostovtzeff

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has been taxed by some of his fellow historians with having read into the Roman Revolution in the 3rd century of the Christian Era some of his own experience of the Russian Revolution in and after 1917. This charge against this great mind may be not altogether unjustified, but all historians, including Rostovtzeff's accusers, come under the same verdict. There may be differences in the degree to which an historian's outlook is governed by the accident of his own location in time and space, but this is a servitude from which no historian can ever wholly escape.

If there were any province of the past which the historian could study without having his view of it influenced by his own experience in his own day, it might be expected to be found in the history of one of those early civilisations that have been unearthed by the modern archæologist's spade after having lain buried and forgotten for hundreds or even thousands of years. Yet, even in our modern rediscovery of the history of Ancient Egypt, our judgement of the past can be affected by our present feelings. The heretical Pharaoh-philosopher Ikhnaton, who was so controversial a figure in his lifetime in the 14th century B.C., has, once again, aroused strong feelings, for him and against him, since his records were retrieved in the 1880's after an interval of perhaps 1,400 years during which there was no living memory of his existence. Western scholars in the 20th century of the Christian era, like Egyptian ecclesiastics and officials in the 14th century B.C., have taken sides, passionately, in the controversy over this ambivalently attractive/provocative personality.

This apparently inescapable subjectivity of our glimpses of even the more distant past makes the objective reality in the human, as well as the astronomical, universe very elusive. Is there any possibility of our observing past human affairs without warping the shape of the past in the very act of observation?

There is no possibility of wading out of the flowing stream of history and taking up a stationary position on the bank. The historian and the people whom he is observing are, alike, inevitably *en voyage* in the same irreversible direction down the time-stream. Both parties are on the move; but this, in itself, is a human experience that they have in common. Both parties have the same human destiny and the same human nature; and this measure of uniformity in our human predicament makes it possible for us to enter into the thoughts, feelings, decisions, actions, and experience of other human beings by analogy with our own. Moreover, by analysing the likenesses and differences between ourselves and other human beings we can learn something about ourselves. We can discover some of our own peculiarities, our own particular slant or bias; and this is valuable; for, if we are right in believing that each one of us has a bias that is incorrigible, the next best thing to the impossible remedy of eliminating it is to know what it is and to make a clean breast of it to other people. The honest historian is the one who does not pretend to have no bias, but who does tell his reader what he thinks his bias is. Yet our intellectual limitations make it impossible for even a complete candour to be fully revealing. When an historian has informed his reader, without any reservations, of every bias of which the historian is aware in himself, the historian and the reader alike will still be victims of the bias of which the historian remains unaware—and this bias of which we are not conscious is often the most distorting bias of all.

Still, the uniformity of human nature does make it possible, in at least two senses, for us to break through the barrier of subjectivity that insulates one human soul from another. The human social animal does have some crucial personal experiences—for instance, birth, marriage, parenthood, and death—which make a uniform foundation of life below the almost infinitely variegated superstructure of superficial manners and customs; and these fundamental experiences are the themes of the greatest works of art. At a less deep level, too, the uniformity produces recurrences of mental and social situations that lend themselves to scientific study. In the sciences of psychology, logic, theory of knowledge, anthropology, sociology, and economics, certain aspects of human affairs can be dealt with by the human mind by those scientific methods that have been so successful

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in Man's study of non-human nature. Yet there are also some experiences that are perhaps intrinsically unclassifiable and unpredictable. The most momentous events in life are the encounters between one personality and another. It is from these that all acts of creation seem to spring. Yet no one can ever foretell what the outcome of any such encounter is going to be.

So the uniformity of human nature is not an open sesame, and even human nature itself is not a permanent fixture in the universe. We know enough about its history to know that, compared to other forms of life, it is a very recent phenomenon on the surface of this planet, and we also know that, one day, it will disappear from the terrestial scene. The same time-stream that has borne it into existence will eventually carry it away, and we have no knowledge of its existence on any other star. We know that, during all but a fraction of past time, the universe has had a history without human historians, and we can forsee that, during all but a fraction of time to come, it will have a history without human historians once again. Yet, though we can string these words together and put them into currency, a history without historians is really something incomprehensible and inconceivable to human minds.

Is there, then, anything truly permanent in the universe with which we human beings can have any kind of communion? This is a question with which the elusiveness of history is bound to confront us; but it is a question that points beyond time and therefore beyond history too. It points to Heaven (or Hell) for that half of mankind that lives by the Jewish tradition; and, for the other half, that lives by the Buddhist tradition, it points to Nirvana.

Both Nirvana and Heaven are conceptions of a reality outside history—a reality that is much more real than any merely historical reality can be. Have these conceptions of a transcendent reality any warrant in any experience that is accessible to human beings? Most human beings, in their ordinary experience of life, are confined to the time-stream as strictly as fish are confined to the water. Yet a few people have reported to the rest of us the experience of breaking out of time into an altogether different dimension of spiritual existence. In terms of time, the duration of this experience may be almost infinitesimally brief; yet an experience which, if it had been still in the time-stream, might have occupied no more than a fraction of a moment, can be eternal in its own dimension, just because this dimension is right outside the flow of time.

Here we are out of history in the realm of religious experience; and this experience of eternity is reported, by all who have had it, to be a blissful one. But, while we still have Man's perennial hope of thus breaking out of history in an ecstasy, we are now also haunted by a fear of being deported out of history in our everyday life. We have seen that "objective" history is always elusive. The historian's most sincere attempts to grasp it are always partly baffled by the inescapable subjectiveness of his own point of view. Might not an omnipotent dictator, armed with new weapons of psychological technique, be able to cut his subjects off completely from all contact with the objective past? Might not he be able to impose on them a view of history that was wholly subjective, and in which the subjective point of view was, not theirs, but his? If this nightmare could be translated into reality in the interests of authoritarian government, a latter-day mankind would be reduced to the condition of its most primitive ancestors. It would be in history without having any knowledge of history; and this ignorance of history in a world whose living fauna included human beings would be still more weird than the earlier and later ignorance of history in a universe without any human inhabitants.

Could this dictators' paradise ever become practical politics? Is it likely that mankind's view of history could be successfully conditioned to conform to the view that their rulers deemed politically expedient? The very suggestion that this might be possible makes us shudder, but, happily, there are at least two obstacles in real life to the achievement of any such diabolical design.

The first obstacle lies in the impossibility of keeping every living human soul psychologically conditioned simultaneously. It is perhaps

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theoretically conceivable that all living human beings save one could be kept in a hypnotic trance, but this presupposes that at least one hypnotiser is in action; and, in order to hypnotise his fellow human beings, the hypnotiser himself must remain unhypnotised. But, if he is unhypnotised, he will be in the normal state of human freedom, and, if he is free, he cannot make himself proof against the possibility of his changing his mind one day and reversing his policy.

This comforting consideration has been set out by Sir Charles Darwin in *The Next Million Years*; but, long before we are driven back on this last line of defence against tyranny, we are likely to bring this arch-enemy of human freedom to a halt; for there is a wayward, contrary, ungovernable element in human nature—an element akin to the recalcitrancy of our cousins the camel, mule, and goat—which is the bane of dictators. No doubt we are, all of us, conditioned, to some extent, by the traditional "culture-pattern" to which we have been moulded by the accident of the time and place of our birth; and different cultures differ widely in the degree of effectiveness of their schooling in submissiveness. Yet, in history up to date, there has been no schooling that has been able to guarantee to tyrants that their subjects will not revolt at last at some intolerable turn of the screw. The revolting-point may be reached sooner in Irishmen than in Germans, and sooner in Germans than in Russians or in Chinese; but in all human beings, hitherto, there has always been a point at which the worm has turned. Even when we have made all allowance for the application of new psychological techniques in the service of tyranny, past experience seems to make it unlikely that human tyrants will ever succeed in taking mankind right out of history, so long as human life—and, with it, Man's mulish nature—continues to survive on Earth.

Tom Scott

The Bride

I dreamed a luesome dream o ye yestreen.
Ye stuid in dawin fields agin a purpour luft,
And a tree o floueran starns rase frae your croun.
Lown* as a simmer sea ye stuid, your breists
Keekan frae the lint-locks o your hair,
And ye were leaman § with a radiance eterne:
Ye, my evir-virgin, evir-breedan bride.

Your waddin kiss, the warld your bodie is,
Are brenned ayebydan in my benmaist hert,
As Psyche's oil in Eros' shouther brenned.

Wap your love-spells round me evirmair,
Bind me til ye with your daethless love
My queen, my queyn, the douchter o our God,
Lead me on throu evirgrouwan licht, and be
My love, my ain, the guid o the god in me.

In burns o immortal rain, baptise me love.

* calm § glowing

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Jossleyn Hennessy

Shanta: India's Dancer

1. *The Splendour Unheeded*

I ENJOY ballet; so when I went to India I was naturally on the look-out for opportunities to see Indian dancing. But, in the end, it was infinitely more than a balletomane's pleasure that I got out of what I found: it was the revelation of a whole way of life. It was the discovery that I—a foreigner from another continent, with a different civilisation and scale of values, ignorant of any Indian language—had found a key to open a casement from which I could look into a world of astonishing beauty. And it was Shanta who gave me that key. It was through her art that I began to share, in part at least, the poetry, emotions, and outlook of a civilisation that is not easy for Europeans to penetrate.

The obstacles that impede a foreigner from acquiring an interest in, and an appreciation of, Indian culture are sizeable. Hitherto at least, he has had no incentive to learn an Indian language because virtually every Indian in the professional classes spoke English. Moreover, the European population of Delhi, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta runs into thousands, so that it is easy to fall into an exclusively European social round. And since caste rules make it difficult to eat with orthodox Hindus or to meet their women, intimate social intercourse is confined to those who are "Westernised," and who, for the most part, have lost many points of contact with their own culture. Thus, the Westerner in India is faced with an alien culture difficult to understand, and whose more intrusive points seem positively repellant: "unnatural" monkey, elephant, and many-armed gods; the messy festival of Holi when you are likely to get a nasty red liquid thrown over you in the streets; and all the unhygienic customs that Katherine Mayo dwelt upon at such loving length in *Mother India*.

My attempts to attune my Western self to Hindu ideas of God and worship met at first with only moderate success. There is a difference between acquiring theoretical knowledge through books, and watching and sharing in a living practice, making it part of your experience. To have read a dozen volumes about Catholicism is not the same as going to Mass, or celebrating Christmas and Easter. It was Shanta who brought the Mahabharata out of the study and gave me some first-hand acquaintance with Siva, Krishna, Arjuna, Ravena, Urvashi, the *asparas*, and so many other divinities and heroes. She made them real to me because they are real to her, as they are to few Indians today.

Educated Indians are, from several generations of experience of what to expect from foreigners, shy to talk of their religious beliefs. Most of them today are sceptics anyway, and spend as little time in reading their holy books as the present generation of Englishmen spend in reading the Bible. I am not suggesting that there are no devout people left in India (or in Britain); but they are normally found in strata of society not easily accessible in the leisure hours of the average European businessman in India. Outside the priesthood, scarcely any Indian can have made India's holy writ so much a part of her daily life as Shanta.

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It is one thing to read an impersonal textbook that tells you that prayer is a lifting of the heart and mind to God: it is another to see Shanta in the expressive gesture-rhythms of Bharata Natya, the classical South Indian dance,

> Why art Thou angry with me, O Lord who wearest the crescent moon in thy hair, who art the supreme Lord of Pillai?
>
> Did I ever say that Thou didst stand on one foot like a thief in holy Chidambaram or that Thou possessest but a single bull?
>
> Have I ever said, O Lord, that Thou dost go begging with a skull-bowl and eatest out of it, and that Thou didst eat with relish the food left by others? Or that Thou didst have no weapon to destroy the three worlds of evil, but stood in front of them smiling? Why, then, this anger?

Appreciation of India's classical dances is limited to a microscopic number of people. Most Indian audiences understand as little of their gesture language as do Westerners. Indian films have completed the ruin begun by Western disapproval of "temple prostitution." Most Indian films include dance numbers, but the dancing has as much relation to Bharata Natya as a chorus girl's high kicks have to Western ballet. Indian film dancers delight in the vulgarly erotic arm and belly ripplings known in France as the *danse du ventre*, not one of which is to be found in Indian classical dancing —any more than they are in Western. To sympathise with Shanta's view of the *danse du ventre*, you have only to imagine Margot Fonteyn's horror if asked to introduce it in a "Swan Lake" solo. So little interest in classical dancing is left in India today, that no dancer can earn a living by her art.

Shanta Rao was born the only daughter of well-to-do Brahmin parents in Bombay. (She belongs to the same caste group as Sir Narsing Rao, who drafted India's constitution and who represented India at the U.N.O.) Her's was the conventional childhood of a member of a high-caste family. She was educated at the Fellowship School in Bombay. One gets the impression that Shanta was unsatisfied at home—certain it is that, while still in her teens, she left it. Mrs. Stan Harding first met her in Bangalore studying painting. In India, a girl living by herself, away from home, is rare enough to arouse speculation: it may mean that her parents were unusually indulgent or unusually indifferent.

Mrs. Stan Harding, a pioneer in the rediscovery of the Indian dance, told me that it was she, full of her researches into the vanishing art of Kathakali, who aroused Shanta's curiosity about the dance. Shanta went to the village of Shoranur in Cochin State where the Malayali poet, Vallothol, had assembled two or three old men, last of a great line of Kathakali teachers, in hopes of reviving interest in Kerala's dance drama. Shanta spent two and a half years studying Kathakali and Mohini Attam. Her day's work began at 2.30 a.m. with eye exercises around a fire, and continued with scarcely a break until "lights out" at 9 p.m. Part of her training was to learn by heart the innumerable stories from the Mahabharata which are enacted in Kathakali. There is no Western parallel to this, save to imagine a school of ballet whose object is to teach its pupils to dance favourite stories from the Bible, requires them to memorise the texts, and teaches them a fantastically complicated and refined gesture-language capable of interpreting them, line by line, word by word.

In due course, Shanta left for Madras in order to find a Bharata Natya teacher. She turned down all the fashionable city schools and sought out Minaksi Sundaram Pillai in the lost village of Pandanallur. Here, remote from the amenities that a gently bred Brahmin girl would usually expect, Shanta studied from 5.45 a.m. until 11 p.m. for four years, with occasional breaks of a few weeks. Her studies at Pandanallur have never really ceased, for like all great dancers, in the West as in the East, her classwork never stops; she still goes back for refresher courses.

2. *Vissi d'Arte*

SHANTA'S studio in Bangalore, South India, is about 24 feet wide, 30 feet deep, 18 feet to the top of the walls, and perhaps 24 feet to the apex of the upward soaring roof, which is covered with brick-red tiles decorated with white fleurs-de-lis and supported by sixteen exposed timber rafters. The window curtains are green with thin yellow-check stripes, with

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a wide plum-coloured border. The furniture, as might be expected in a dancer's studio, is sparse and easily moved.

She stands, I should guess, five feet tall, but she seems taller. She has the fair skin of a Kashmiri. Dressed in Western clothes, she would be taken for a Castilian beauty. Her glinting ebon hair is parted in the middle and brushed back on either side to reveal her intelligent forehead. Her pencilled eye-brows sweep in wide arcs over her long-lashed eyes. Between them is a scarlet beauty spot (most Europeans mistakenly call this a "caste mark"). Her gaze is direct and steady as she greets you, gravely attentive when listening to what you say. Her lips are full, sensuous not sensual. Her hands are slim and, with long practice in the gesture language of the dance, her fingers flex backward as easily and expressively as forward. Between her bodice and her skirt, her midriff is bare. Her bare feet are sandalled.

The technicolour film of the Coronation was showing locally, and feeling that Shanta would enjoy it, I invited her to come with me. She refused graciously, saying that she never goes out with anyone except her aunt (who keeps house for her). Stupid of me, because of course she couldn't accept. As a woman living alone, and above all as a dancer, every orthodox Hindu would assume that she had no morals and would be on the look-out for behaviour to confirm his suspicions. To be seen out alone with a man who is not a close relation would prove the worst. Shanta is a pious Brahmin and she takes minute precautions to do all that is necessary to preserve her reputation and the honour of her heaven-born caste.

As I listened to her, I realised how much in life that is normal, pleasant, and happy, Shanta has put behind her for the sake of her art. Her parents must have looked forward to a brilliant marriage for their lovely and exceptionally talented daughter. Her desire to study painting and dancing would have pleased them if she had been content to do so in a lady-like, amateur way. But they must have been as appalled at discovering her determination to study under genuine traditional village *nattuvans*, and to adopt dancing as a profession, as decent right-thinking 19th century Western parents would have been to discover that their daughter wanted to go on the music hall stage.

In India, the bachelor-girl is, to the righteous orthodox Hindu, an offence, and to the unrighteous, a provocation and a legitimate prey. Save in limited circles in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras (cities which account for a decimal fraction of India's population), the social structure is not organised to allow the bachelor-girl a niche. Shanta uttered no word of complaint in the few guarded references that she made to her relations with the *beau monde*, but I sensed an undercurrent of bitterness. She would have liked its understanding of her dedication to art. I think that, in a way, it was the indifference of her parental world to her art that hurt her more than its hostility to herself.

Shanta's father seems to have experienced to the full the sorrow of his daughter's choice, but there is consolation in recording that just before his death, he asked to see her. He was reconciled to her career, and even showed a certain pride in it. Of her mother, she said: "She hopes that I'll marry and settle down."

During the four years of her dance studies, Shanta exchanged few letters with her parents. Her mother does not speak English and Shanta does not write her mother's language. At school, Vallothol's eldest daughter, a woman of forty, looked after her. She went home for one month in each year. "But at the end of a fortnight, I began to be restless and to look forward to getting back to my work," she told me. We talked of Bharata Natya. "It's a dying art," she said. "All the old teachers—those who really know about it—I don't mean these finishing schools that have made 'folk-dancing' (O my God!) fashionable among society débutantes, but all the genuine hereditary nattuvans—are so discouraged that they don't want their sons to waste time in such a useless profession, so they're not teaching them."

Shanta gets up at 5.30 a.m., practises until 7.30, when she takes half an hour off for breakfast. From 8 a.m. to midday her musicians are with her, and she does her creative work, i.e. the choreography of the ballets which she is composing. Then lunch and half an hour's rest.

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From 1 p.m. she paints for two hours. Next she gets out her portable and, sitting like Buddha on one of the poufs, she types. She is writing a book about dancing. She goes to bed between eleven and midnight. She has worked like this all her life.

I asked Shanta if she were happy. This is a question that is, I imagine, rarely put seriously to anyone, and still more rarely answered seriously. But Shanta said simply: "No. I am often in agony of spirit. I feel I have so much inside me to say, such thoughts, such feelings, and so little chance to say them."

One of the disconcerting discoveries that I made was how far between her public appearances are. Perhaps a dozen recitals a year, in groups of three or four at a time, with gaps of long, fruitless months between, when she is dancing her heart out to herself in this studio.

3. *The Three Pitiless Old Men*

We talked of Shanta's teachers.

Gratitude, affection, respect, describe the attitude of Western dancers towards the great teachers of the previous generation, such as Preobrajenskaya or Cechetti, but they fail to convey the depths of Shanta's feelings towards the great *nattuvans*, Ramuni Menon (Kathakali), Krishnan Pannikar (Mohini Attam), and Minaksi Sundaram Pillai (Bharata Natya), who taught her.

To enter her feelings, one must sympathise with the reverence and obedience that are traditional between an Indian student and his *guru* (teacher), and one must grasp that, to Shanta, dancing is not a mere profession but a religious vocation. For Bharata Natya in its danced prayers to God, and Kathakali in its re-enactments of the scriptures, have a direct part in religion.

When Shanta arrived at Vallothol's school in Malabar, she was put in a mild class for débutantes who wanted to learn a few harmless steps of "drawing-room" Kathakali. But she saw the real thing going on under Ramuni Menon next door. She asked to join his class.

"Kathakali isn't for girls," he said contemptuously.

Shanta persisted. At last Menon grudgingly yielded on condition that she followed the same hours and training as the boys, ending at 9 p.m. and beginning again at 2.30 a.m. The pre-dawn hours were occupied with eye exercises in which, *inter alia*, the pupils learnt not to blink their eyes once—this accounts for the extraordinary steadiness of Shanta's gaze. Menon used to stride round with a stick to rap anyone who eye-faulted.

I tried to form impressions of the characters of Shanta's teachers, but she is as inhibited about them as the typical public school "old boy" in Ian Hay's *Lighter Side of School Life* who, asked for a description of his headmaster, thought for a long time and then said: "He was a holy terror."

"What was Ramuni Menon like?" I asked.

Shanta hesitated, uncomfortably. "He was very stern," she said at last.

"What else?"

"He was very severe."

"And——?"

"He didn't speak much. He indicated by gestures—very clearly."

"Were you afraid of him?"

"Terribly," she said in a small voice.

"Why?"

She thought. "He made me feel guilty if I made a mistake. He made me feel remorseful if I were even a few seconds late."

Guilt and remorse seem close to the surface in Shanta. You have only to say something that could be mistaken for a reproach and she is seized with contrition.

I pressed for more details, first about one teacher, then another. For example: "They obviously had religious culture, but were they men of fine feelings? Apart from their prodigious knowledge of the dance, weren't they just simple villagers, narrow, and probably petty in a lot of ways?"

"Why are you so interested in them?" she countered defensively. "They're not important to you."

After she had been with Vallothol six months, she discovered that another teacher, Krishnan Pannikar, was the last living master of Mohini Attam and she made a space in her bulging curriculum for lessons from him. Recognising her talent and her enthusiasm,

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Pannikar taught her not only the movements but the music, without which the dance makes no sense. Shanta was rewarded for her simultaneous efforts: if she had postponed her Mohini Attam lessons, her chance would have gone for ever. Pannikar died, and today Shanta is the only dancer living who knows Mohini Attam. Since she has danced it in public, others have copied her, but she is the only person who has done the training and who knows the music, which she has taught to her musicians.

Her descriptions of Krishnan Pannikar and Minaksi Sundaram were the same as of Ramuni Menon: they were stern, ascetic, old, wrapped up in their religion and their work. And they were jealous and scornful about each other.

These three old men drove her so hard and imbued her so deeply with their religious ideal, and with their devotion to the dance, that she has never since wanted to have anything to do with men—she said as much though I cannot remember her exact words: something like: "I couldn't take any more." She never passes a day without saying a prayer to them.

And, of course, her health was undermined by the inadequate food, the physical strain, and the lack of rest. Shanta's earliest memories are of illness. As a young child, she had rheumatic fever which has left her momentarily blind in strong lights. That is why she lives with drawn curtains in her studio and why she prefers amber lights for her recitals.

"What a childhood you had!" I said.

"Was I ever a child? Before dancing I was always being ill. Then I plunged into that extraordinary hard life, getting up at 3.30 a.m. and so on, but all the time I felt the hardships were worth-while—even though the difficulties were sometimes really rather overwhelming. If I could live my life again, I'd spend it at the feet of my masters and learn more. *Those* were my happy days. The tragedy of it is that the art of my masters is vanishing. No one wants classical purity today. They want the soft sugary line that cinema dancers give. . . . I made such efforts to understand what my masters wanted. . . . They were treasure houses of such beauty. . . . Even if I danced all day and night for weeks and months on end, I could not exhaust what they gave me, yet I learnt nothing like all that they had to give. There is so much to learn and so little time—and now what's the use? So few people care."

4. *Prayer*

I ASKED her: "Bharata Natya is continuously concerned with religious ideas, and the dancer spends much time in portraying prayer, but isn't it just like acting? You don't have to believe in God in order to act the part of a priest convincingly, any more than you have to believe in God to dance a convincing prayer?"

"Well, you see," Shanta began, matter-of-factly, "when I begin to dance a conversation with God——"

She paused, closed her eyes to shut out her surroundings and to collect her thoughts, and then began one of those prayers into which, with an indescribable intensity, she pours her soul, and I wished that some of my Western friends who say that Hinduism is all form and ritual and has no contact with eternal values could have been there with me. I wished that some of my up-to-date Hindu friends who have turned their backs on the old Gods without finding new ones could have been there. Shanta made me forget that she was a Brahmin praying to Gods that were strange to me. She was neither of the East nor of the West, but just a woman telling God her love and seeking the comfort of his protection.

Shanta withdrew herself from prayer and returned to me: "When I am dancing such a conversation, God takes on the guise of a lover in my mind and I feel lost in him and at one with him." Even as she spoke, she half slipped back into communion. She was transformed as she described her dance unions with God. Her face shone; she radiated a mystic joy.

She has read the whole of the Bible; she is saturated with Hindu sacred writ; but she feels as much drawn to Islam as to Hinduism. "I think I'm more of a Sufi than anything else."

5. *Wanted : A Stage Manager*

SHANTA gave a recital at the Puttan Chetty Town Hall.

How maddening everything to do with Indian classical dancing is! Few Indians are

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interested in it and those few see it under such conditions! Experienced stage managers do not exist in India. Outside Udy Shankar's team there isn't one in India. On this night, arc lights bathed Shanta's face in a hellish red and shed dazzling white beams into the eyes of the audience. The house-lights were switched on and off throughout the recital for no special reason. Late-comers strolled in talking loudly and looked about for their seats without embarrassment. And the technique of helping the audience to applaud by lowering the curtain at a crescendo and raising it when they're slacking! (Indian curtains, however, work so ponderously that in the time it takes to get them down and up between calls you could go out and eat a ham sandwich.)

Shanta's masters taught her to dance but nothing about the psychology of audiences. She does not know how to take a bow. For two hours she has been working on the emotions of the audience and only now can they release the pent-up tide; but Shanta's shy, hurried bow frustrates them.

Criticism must be indulgent in India: on one occasion when I told Shanta that I didn't think much of her lighting, she revealed that she had spent the four hours previous to her three hours recital in organising what the stage manager had messed up. Nor was today's red flood her choice: it was hell-fire or nothing.

6. *Urvashi's Curse*

I ARRIVED at 9 a.m. expecting to watch Shanta practise, but instead found her dressed in a white sherwani (flared, knee-length coat) over a canary-yellow sari with a purple border, sitting like Buddha, writing letters on a wooden tray on her lap. Her little aunt was squatting on the floor, struggling to fit square letters into oblong envelopes. She cocked her head from side to side to consider letter and envelope attentively from different angles to make sure that her eyes did not deceive her and that the one would indeed not go into the other. She then folded and refolded, with great care, as though one thoughtless moment would cause an explosion. She brought off several near misses before winning through to crumpled success. Papers scattered over the wide open spaces of the floor suggested the passage of a hurricane. The musicians squatted on their mat, humming tunes to each other beneath their breath, tapping faint rhythms with their fingers. Everyone was preoccupied.

It seemed that K. M. Pannikar, then India's ambassador to Egypt, a man of varied parts, learning, and culture, had seen Shanta dance and had been so delighted that he had asked her if she would go to Egypt and show India's classical dancing there and in the Middle East. Left to themselves, I do not doubt that Pannikar and Shanta would have easily fixed the programme, but the tour had to be sponsored through the usual official channels. The Indian government and Shanta had locked themselves in an unbreakable clinch which seemed likely to end only with the death of one or the other.

When I turned up, Shanta was between mystification and madness. Faced with a "bombastic" (one of Shanta's favourite adjectives, which I think she regards as derived from the verb "to bomb") letter from Delhi, Shanta had collected the most wounding, vicious, cobra-toothed words in her colourful vocabulary and poured them through the keys of her portable in a blast intended to leave a smoking ruin where once New Delhi stood.

Shanta's face reflected the contents of her letter line by line. Now she tautened the delicate arcs of her brows into hard, straight arrows; now she compressed her full lips into cruel slits; now a gleeful smile lit up her face as she hastened to fit some nice barb into place before she forgot it, and once in a while, when the battle was going all her way, she would break into a gay little song.

Shanta read me extracts, alternately hugging herself over their aptness and raging over their necessity. She was half mad with the whole world and laughing at herself for her madness. The word "bombastic" fell like a landmine, spreading destruction on several occasions. I regret that I can now remember only one sentence: "The so-called independent Government of India has not shed the slave mentality of those who cringed to the Vice-kings." I would not venture an opinion on the justice of this observation, but if the test of

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prose perfection be that every word of a sentence has been posted with loving care in exactly the right place to create the desired effect, then this sentence is perfect, for no other combination of words out of the half-million in the English language could cause more hopping-madness in New Delhi than these twenty.

"My God! My God!" Shanta exclaimed. "I'm getting into confusion. My pull is towards dancing at this hour. I can't focus my eyes on the paper. I can't think of the words to use. Music is in my head. . . . I am *disgusted* !!!"

Abruptly she rose and, fire darting from her eyes, her arms weaving a stormy filigree, she denounced this wretched government until one felt sorry for it—guilty though it was, like the jackdaw of Rheims.

Usually when I come to watch Shanta dance, she does an *enchainement*, and then explains its technical points and the *mudras*, but today she swept poufs, note-paper, letters, envelopes, typewriters, and little aunts, to the four corners, pitched on her practice sari, and tore into the grandest Varnam that she will ever give. She may equal it; she can never better it.

The story that she danced told how the gods, seeing that Arjuna, "that tiger among men," the great warrior hero of the Mahabharata, was leading an ascetic life which, they felt, could hardly be good for him, decided to send Urvashi, most beautiful of the *asparas* to teach him the delights of love. So Urvashi "of the luminous smiles" bathed and decked herself in charming ornaments and splendid garments, rich in celestial perfumes. And inflamed by the god of love, when the twilight had deepened and the moon was up, the high-hipped *aspara* set out for Arjuna's palace. Although the heavens abounded in beauty, when Urvashi walked, swaying in diverse attitudes expressive of delight, the Siddhas and Charanas and Gandharvas thought her the most beautiful thing that they had ever seen. Arjuna, like Adonis with Aphrodite, was overcome with shyness at Urvashi's wooing. With a thousand embarrassed excuses, he said: No. "Thus addressed," records the Mahabharata, "Urvashi was deprived of her senses with wrath." She contracted those lovely eye-brows which could move so bewitchingly, and she cursed Arjuna. And her curse was that he should be a eunuch for all eternity. (Urvashi's curse was not effective because, in the manner typical of epic heroes, Arjuna went and told his father who raised absolute hell in heaven until a suitable compromise was found.)

Shanta was in such a state of irritation, anger, frustration, and bitterness, that Arjuna could scarcely open his mouth. She cut short and rounded on his slightest, his most innocent, remark, until the great hero of the Mahabharata turned tail, glad to escape from the first unequal contest in which the Gods had ever allowed him to get involved. The scorn Shanta poured on him, the detail in which her venomous *mudras* told him what she thought of him, gave me the grandest, most enthralling forty unbroken minutes of dancing, the like of which I have never seen before and shall never see again.

Shanta danced without a single one of the customary grace periods in which the dancer pauses for breath. Only those who have seen Bharata Natya—and seen it as Shanta dances it—can grasp what a triumph of mind over body she thus achieved.

The musicians caught fire from Shanta and sang, beat, and fingered melodies and rhythms that took their own selves by surprise. There is an element of improvisation in this music which adds to the excitement of the closely ravelled skein of sound and movement. One sees the musicians on the crest of the wave, exulting, throwing challenges to each other and to the dancer. Shanta's musicians were revelling in their art as they set each other technical problems of pattern, rhythm, and response. "Take this if you can!" the drummer, his fingers playing like the lightning of a virtuoso Western pianist, beat a dizzy strophe to the singer. "Taken," laughed the singer with his eyes, "Here's one for you!" And he sang one of those complicated onomatopœic rhythm verses that abound in this music, "And here's something for all of you," stamped Shanta's feet. Thus, playing with, and to, each other, taking up and tossing challenges back and forth in faultless team precision, Shanta and her musicians played themselves and me away

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from rising prices, riots, strikes, murders, and all the cruelties and follies of mankind.

7. *The Heart's Core*

TODAY, from 9 until 11.45 a.m., Shanta danced what I chose for her and answered my questions as she went along. . . . You may get an idea of the exhilaration of this experience if you imagine that one of the world's great exponents of the art that you enjoy the most had invited you, alone, to his studio so that he could play (or sing or dance) and explain whatever you wanted. (Whom would you choose? Arthur Rubinstein at his piano? Thomas Beecham preparing a Mozart score for a concert? Maggie Teyte singing Debussy songs?)

I refrain (wistfully) from a detailed description of the morning's dancing and seize upon one item only: a scene from Shanta's Mohini Attam ballet, *Ambapali*. I have seen her dance this several times on the stage and I asked her to explain it in detail today.

Ambapali, a famous courtesan, is mentioned in Buddhist holy writ. Shanta's ballet portrays her as determined to win Buddha's passionate love. She meets him but is herself converted by the Master's teaching. She gives up all to follow him as a humble disciple.

The ballet opens with Ambapali seated in a lovely stylised pose representing sleep. For the first dozen bars, she does not stir—Shanta, her torso leaning back unsupported, was so still and achieved such an effect of repose, that an enormous pile of soft pillows took Bakst-ian shapes and colours before my very eyes. Suchita, her maid, enters, Ambapali awakens with a start—a small movement, stylised and perfect, which made me realise once again how much of this type of dancing, meant to be seen in the hall of a temple or of a royal court, is lost when viewed in a big theatre.

Shanta then dances the following dialogue:

Suchita: Why are you awake? You must be fresh for tomorrow.

Ambapali: Dear Suchita! Tonight you do not see the Ambapali you are used to, the famous and successful courtesan. You see an ordinary woman whose fears and weaknesses are as your own.

Suchita: Oh, my dear one! Have you, of all women, become a love-sick girl? Like all the others, seeking the man of your dreams?

Ambapali: How your mind dwells on romance! Ah, if I knew where I could find truth and wisdom! Although I seem gay and inconstant, like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, my heart is stone. My mind is full of a strange premonition. Some terrible doom awaits me. I feel it near, yet I know not what it is. My spirit trembles like a frightened child. And ever in my thoughts arises the figure of Buddha. I cannot dispel his image. How slowly the leaden hours of the dark night pass. From my inmost being a prayer wells up to the divine Saraswati, goddess of all the arts of feminine charm. She must help me to be the greatest courtesan of all time, so that I can win immortal fame by conquering Buddha. That is the desire that fills me. But, O Suchita, the conflict of my thoughts! I cannot tell you what lies in my heart's core. (*She looks into a mirror.*) Yes, Suchita, I am still beautiful, but the first flush of my youth is past. Fear encompasses me and darkness of spirit closes around me. I feel lost. O Saraswati devi! Sustain me with thine heavenly strength and help me from the pit of my despair.

This was as far as Shanta had completed the choreography. The ballet is to end with the realisation of Ambapali's "strange premonition": she is conquered by Buddha.

When I first saw Shanta dance this, I had the curiosity to look up the references to Ambapali in the forty-nine volumes of Max Müller's edition of the Sacred Books of the East. There are six: they describe Ambapali's conversion but do not hint that she tried to seduce Buddha. The whole of the foregoing dialogue is the fruit of Shanta's creative imagination. Shanta represents herself in the courtesans Urvashi and Rambha—but note that Arjuna rejects Urvashi and that Rambha is prevented from reaching her lover. And if her portrayals of Urvashi and Rambha give us indirect hints, in Ambapali, she lays bare (in her own words) "her heart's core."

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Dan Jacobson

Request Stop

THE door of the aeroplane opened, and the hostess's voice rang in the dazed silence: "All passengers out, please." There was a pause, then a stir among the passengers. Slowly they stood up, stretched themselves, felt the stillness of the plane swaying beneath them like the sea. Then they began filing out, stepping carefully down the ladder that an African had wheeled to receive them. At the door another African squirted them with some sort of insecticide. They gasped a little at it, smiled shakily. Then they stepped out on the runway and looked around them. But hastily they looked back at one another; they could not face the desolation of the bush. All round them was bush, just bush, and one road leading from the airport to God knows where, disappearing very shortly in the bush. The airport itself was long and clean and almost entirely deserted. There were a few buildings, a control tower, a small refreshment room, and the rest was the concrete runway, and a long stretch of grass, and the bush. A small two-seater plane, bright red, was parked near a corrugated iron hangar.

Heat hung over the airport, as heavy as water, and the passengers' limbs moved slowly through the heat as though they were dragging them through water. The air was quite still, it almost seemed to sag within the heat-bound, bush-bound space that had been cleared to receive the silver planes dropping out of the sky.

The passengers moved in a bedraggled little group across the runway towards the refreshment room. An African sat at a table and took their passports. He was very neatly dressed, and very cool, paging through each passport, and then putting them aside in a little heap. Another African, perhaps an apprentice, sat to the side and watched him. A white South African passenger stared for a long time at the two Africans: he still had not recovered from being squirted by a black man. He looked around for someone to talk to, but the few fellow South Africans on the plane seemed too sunken under the heat to take any notice of who took their passports or who squirted them with insecticide. He did approach one, and gestured towards the trim black man looking through the passports: "Wouldn't have that sort of thing in our country, would we?"

"No," the other replied, staring listlessly at the black man. "It's their funeral, not ours." But whether it was a funeral for the whites or for the blacks in the country they were flying over, he did not say. Carrying his jacket slung over his shoulders, and with his shirt hanging out of his trousers, he walked into the refreshment room. The other South African was still staring at the African, then his gaze shifted to the passengers still straggling across the runway, a ragged little troupe in bright colours, but all walking wearily. Then across the bare length of the airport, then to the bush, and then to the great exhausted sky, where high up, two birds circled against the yellowish frame, two small lazy specks gyrating meaninglessly and frighteningly in the desert of air.

THE African was querying a passport possessed by a small hairy Greek who could only speak Greek. He was flying back to

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Greece. No one among the passengers or anyone on the airport could speak Greek. So they all stared accusingly at him, and he stared back at them deprecatingly. He wore black steel spectacles, the sort less attractive schoolgirls wear to match their gyms, and his false teeth moved uneasily within his closed mouth. The African went on with the other passports, only leaving the Greek's out of the little pile, and keeping the Greek waiting in the shade. He stared sadly at the airport. His eyes were quite expressionless, as dull as leather. He said nothing. The other passengers filed past him, going into the refreshment room. They stared at him without pity, without any emotion at all. It was too hot, and in any case, he did seem to be impossible, in his neat black suit that spoke of poverty among the coloured rags of the other passengers, speaking at least of comfortable circumstances. Yet he did not ask for pity: he was quite blank. The gauze door clattered behind the last of the passengers, and then the crew, consciously casual, like all air-crews, sauntered across the tarmac. One remained behind, to watch the Africans disinfecting the plane, standing with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the back of his head. Another, also with his hands in his pockets, was walking to the control tower. The door clattered again, and now only the Greek was still outside, with the two Africans.

Inside the refreshment room it was very crowded. The passengers drooped on the wooden benches, too fatigued even to get the cool drinks that an African was offering behind a counter. Another African stood behind the counter too, behind a little collection of wood-carvings: little elephants, lions, queer drooping faces. There was another room behind the main one, separated from it by a bead curtain. The women passengers looked at it inquiringly. At last one of the bolder approached the plane's engineer who was nursing a bottle of green cool drink in his hand. "Is that the ladies' lavatory?"

"No, that's where they make tea." He was a big, red-faced man, and his stomach bulged beneath his khaki shirt, and long khaki trousers.

"Where—then?" She gestured questioningly.

"Outside I suppose."

"Oh." The woman hesitated. "Well, I'll go and ask outside," she said. Uncertainly she moved to the door. With a great heaving, another woman got up to follow her, and then another. The plane engineer put the bottle to his forehead, to get the coolness from the glass, and rested like that.

Then the bead curtain rustled aside and a tall Englishman came into the room. All the passengers looked up at him. He stood with the beads swaying slightly behind, and a small smile flickered for a moment across his face. He said in a strained, rather tired voice: "Is everybody being attended to all right?"

"Yes," they said. He looked like a *Punch* caricature of the Englishman in the tropics. He was tall and thin, dressed in khaki, with khaki hose pulled up neatly just below his knees, and he had a long thin face, with a drooping brown moustache beneath his prominent nose. His skin was sallow, quite washed out by the heat, and the hair on the back of his thin, bony hands was burned to yellow. He looked around the room, his eyes jerking from point to point, from passenger to passenger. They were very lonely eyes. He had been looking at too little for too long. At last he walked behind the counter and stood next to the African there. His smile still flickered now and again. He did not seek to open a conversation, but stood still and upright.

With a few guffaws, some of the male passengers got up to go to the lavatory outside. The men seemed to recover from their flight more quickly than the women still remaining in the rest room, who were all drooping and haggard, clutching lace handkerchiefs in the palms of their sweating hands, their blouses and tailored linen suits in disorder. The softness of their flesh seemed softer and more disorganised than ever.

Still, some of them were quite unaffected, just as some of the men were drained with sickness and heat, and leaned their faces on their hands, resting elbows on the stained, plain table tops. One woman was negotiating with

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the African selling the wooden curios. "Will he take my money?" she asked in a high shrill voice, that scratched like a loose fingernail against wood through the heat-drugged room.

The Englishman's smile flickered again on his face. "He'll take any sort of money," he said. Even his upper-class, orthodox accent sounded faded, wearing through in that country like a jacket that had been used for too long.

Automatically, the woman smiled archly back at him. She flirted without thought, as a cat arches its back. Even there, lost in the bush and dependent on the aeroplane alone on the runway she arched an eyebrow, leaned slightly forward and smiled, running through her repertory of tricks as water runs when released down a gulley. The Englishman noticed it, and his own will stirred to the woman. He looked at her, and one hand came forward on the counter and beat a couple of raps on the flattened zinc sheet. He said suddenly: "I wouldn't buy them, you know."

"Oh—why not?"

"They're not the real thing," he said a little jerkily. "It's tourist stuff." He made an indecisive gesture with his hand. He smiled at the woman. She was hovering, with her handbag open, wondering whether to buy or not. She took out her purse, and cast an appealing glance towards him. She came to her decision.

"They're cheap enough." And she took out some silver.

He said in a disinterested voice, "Yes, they're cheap enough." And he did not look again while the woman made her purchase. Once she had done so others among the passengers came forward and toyed with the carvings. But few of them bought, out of inertia perhaps. Nothing seemed important but the heat and the continuation of the flight, awaiting them. It was impossible to take a tourist's interest in what was going on around them. No one snapped anything, though one or two carried cameras, and those who were outside were looking only for a lavatory, and were not aware at all of the bush and the heat and the banana trees, except as an oppression. So they bought practically nothing, and soon drifted away from the counter and went back to the benches and their sickness.

Then for a little while there was silence. The passengers talked quietly to one another, and a fly that had managed to get in despite the gauze buzzed loudly above the opened but unused cool drinks. The African waved his hand at it and it flew off. "Don't send it to me!" a man said and got up waving his hands. A few people smiled. The fly buzzed against the gauze, until the door opened with a bang, and the air hostess stood there: "All aboard for Entebbe," she cried.

A general moan went up from the passengers, complaining, humorous. "Goodness me!" the hostess said. "You wouldn't like to stay here, would you?"

"Christ, no," someone said fervently, and they all began filing out. The gauze door swung open, leaving behind the cool drinks and the Africans and the tall and lonely Englishman. The glare struck at them; they flinched before it, and then went on towards the plane shining like a mirror on the whitish tarmac. The last of the crew was entering the plane. Nearer at hand, the Greek still stood in the shade.

"The hostess will return your passports on the plane," the one official enunciated. He still held one passport in his hand, waving it as he spoke. He looked at it, looked at the Greek, who now had clear drops of sweat on his forehead, and sliding slowly down his cheeks. He turned and said something to the younger man next to him, and then pushed the passport away from him. The Greek stepped forward and took it and began walking to the plane. The two men watched him walk away. One smiled with all his white teeth.

But surprise! Someone was staying there. Look, they were in a jeep, with all their baggage, and two people had come to meet them. The travellers were easily recognisable, the man was wearing long trousers, while the others who had come to meet them were in khaki shirts and shorts. One or two of the airport officials in peaked caps were also standing round. The jeep was pointed towards the road that led to the bush, and the passengers stared in wonder at the two people who lived here, and yet had not simply been found at the airport, who were thus not fixtures of the place,

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but real people. A gear grated in, and with a whine, the jeep was off. As it turned into the impenetrable-seeming bush, the woman passenger half-turned and waved, but whether at the airport officials whom she knew, or just farewell to her former fellow-passengers, no one could say. The jeep was out of sight, but through the sluggard air they still heard its noise as they dragged slowly towards the plane. One man had his hand on the back of his neck, shielding it from the sun. A passenger came from behind a banana tree near the refreshment hut, and hurried after the others. They had all climbed into the plane, except for one woman passenger. She stood hesitating for a moment before the flight of steps, and then went to the side of it, looking up at the plane. She turned her head and was violently sick. The hostess stood bored at her elbow, then helped the gasping woman into the plane. The bright silver door swung closed, and now the plane was sealed, ready to travel, with all the passengers sealed inside it.

The plane taxied to a far corner of the field, and then tested its engines, each of them rising to a great roar, and slackening off again. Dust and bits of grass blew wildly, brown and white, in a funnel of wind, towards the bush. The last engine slackened off, and from the control tower strange sounds thundered across the runway. Then slowly, moving slowly at first, but gaining speed quickly, moving like some great unknown insect, moving on black round legs, the plane roared across the airport, and lifted, and swung up towards the sky. The sky, that yellow daze of space, roared with the noise of its engines, until it was far away, far above the bush, and the refreshment room where the one Englishman stood in the doorway and watched it go, far above the control tower and the limp windsock, above the white tarmac, far away from the streak of vomit that had been left, a human mark on the ground.

Vibrating in their padded shell, the passengers undid their safety-belts and stared at their *Readers' Digests*. The airport was a white strip in the bush beneath them, but soon that too disappeared, and there was only the bush, meaninglessly scarred, and later some cloud near to hand.

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Michael Hamburger

Art and Nihilism: The Poetry of Gottfried Benn

GOTTFRIED BENN'S status in post-war Germany is very nearly as high as T. S. Eliot's in post-war England; like Eliot, Benn is a critic as well as a poet and has done much to create the taste by which his work is judged and appreciated. But here the comparison ends; for while Eliot's criticism is a re-examination of other poets' work and a re-discovery of tradition, most of Benn's is a direct or indirect commentary on his own practice. As for his criteria, they are as different as possible from Eliot's Christian humanism, being anti-Christian, anti-humanistic and—if we accept them at their face value—exclusively æsthetic. Though he has lately been described as "one of the grand old men of literary Europe," Benn retains all the characteristics of an *enfant terrible*. As a poet, he has been obliged to consolidate, if not to retreat from, a position reached nearly thirty years ago; but his critical utterances remain provocative because they form part of a lifelong campaign of aggressive self-defence. This may be one reason why "literary Europe" has not yet endorsed the German valuation of Benn's work; another is that his best poetry, by its very nature, is untranslatable.

The fact that Gottfried Benn is alive at all has something to do with his high reputation; for he is the sole survivor of a generation and a school of poets who were doomed to exile, silence, or early death. Benn was born in 1886; his first book of poems appeared in 1912, a year that seems more remote to most Germans than to most Englishmen. Of the leading poets of Benn's generation, Georg Trakl, Georg Heym, and Alfred Lichtenstein have been dead for forty years. It would be foolish to pretend that a living writer's reputation is not affected by circumstances of this kind, largely irrelevant as they are to his work. Much of the interest that attaches to Benn's writings and utterances is the interest aroused by the sole survivor from a great shipwreck.

BENN'S present status cannot be understood without a rather long glance back at the movement of which he is the last active representative. This movement is Expressionism; and it dominated more than two decades which were extraordinarily rich in promise and excitement. If I have spoken of doom and shipwreck, it is because so much of this promise remained unfulfilled when the events of 1933 brought Expressionism to a sudden end. It is true that the movement was already in decline; and, in a certain sense, it had been doomed from the start, because "begotten by despair upon impossibility." But the banning and dispersal of its members had the effect of once again disrupting the continuity of German literature and of suppressing the new growth that would certainly have followed this organic decline.

The years between 1914 and 1933 were a period of astonishing activity in German literature; there was such a wealth of talent and originality that it is no exaggeration to speak of a literary renaissance. The comparison

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with an earlier German renaissance, the *Sturm und Drang* of the 18th century, is especially apt; for this, too, was essentially a movement of young men, revolutionary in its impetus and its aims, but destined to deteriorate as its members matured. The more prolific of the Expressionists thought nothing of publishing three volumes of verse within a year; this, in itself, is neither a fault nor a virtue, but it is symptomatic of the feverish energy that possessed the whole generation; and it helps to explain why so much of their output has been, conveniently, but often unjustly, forgotten. There was no lack of good craftsmanship; it is the strident pitch of so much Expressionist poetry that makes it hard to bear; and its sheer quantity that makes it hard to evaluate.

Literary Expressionism is usually taken to have begun in 1911 with the publication of two poems, *Weltende* by Jakob van Hoddis and *Dämmerung* by Alfred Lichtenstein. *Weltende* was the first to appear and Lichtenstein admitted having used it as a model, though he rightly claimed to have improved on it. Both poems are rhymed and in regular stanza form. What was new about them was that they consisted of nothing more than an arbitrary concatenation of images taken from contemporary life. They presented a picture, but not a realistic one, for the perspective was distorted and the objects depicted were not such as can normally be found together in the same place and at the same time; they were a kind of *collage*. Hoddis could not resist giving the show away in the title—"End of the World"—an exaggeration all the more blatant because so inappropriate to his ironic choice of disasters. (E.g. "most people have a cold" and "all the railway trains are falling off the bridges.") In Lichtenstein's poem, on the other hand, the images are left to speak for themselves; his title is ambiguous, since the German word "*Dämmerung*" can mean both dawn and dusk; but it is clear from the poem that he means dusk. If his dusk is a cosmic one, he neither says nor implies that it is. He makes no attempt to explain the presence in his poem of two men walking across a field, the "fat boy playing with a pond" or the man described as "sticking to a window." The description is "expressionistic" because the poet's real aim is to communicate his sense of the absurd and the incongruous. The meaning and the irony are in the juxtaposition of the various descriptive fragments that make up the poem.

In some of his other poems, Lichtenstein introduces *a persona*, Kuno Kohn, and qualifies his statements with "if," "but," and "perhaps" ("a fair-haired poet may be going mad"). One thinks of the early Imagists—active in England and America at roughly the same time—and particularly of T. S. Eliot's early verse. Whatever it may owe to such common ancestors as Rimbaud, Laforgue, and Corbière, Lichtenstein's irony, like Eliot's, is a considerable advance on that of any earlier poet; though not free from the self-mockery, familiar since Heine and Musset, which is the intellect's revenge on the heart, he uses irony to mock a whole civilisation, and this without recourse to direct statement. This is one of the early varieties of Expressionism; it is close to caricature, but also asserts a new freedom of association.

Lichtenstein's ironic detachment is far from characteristic of the movement as a whole; but the titles of these two poems made history: Lichtenstein's *Dämmerung* because it reappeared in the title of an important anthology of 1920, *Menscheitsdämmerung*, with the significant difference that his ambiguous dusk had become the "dawn of a new humanity," as the introductory manifesto makes all too clear; Hoddis' *Weltende* because it initiated that abuse of the cosmic which led to a gradual inflation in the verbal currency of Expressionism. Soon it ceased to matter greatly whether a poet predicted the end of the world or a new humanity; both were the stock-in-trade of every poetaster. This is the chief reason why the years between 1914 and 1933—the Expressionist period proper—produced less work of lasting value than the years immediately preceding the First World War. The best of the young poets active before 1914, Georg Trakl, Georg Heym, and Ernst Stadler, did not belong to any movement or subscribe to any programme, though they were later included among the Expressionists. Their prophecies of renewal or destruction were their own; and physically their world was still intact,

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even if they found it spiritually uninhabitable. It is worth noting that their most vivid evocations of war were written before the event: Georg Heym's vision of destruction, *Der Krieg*, in 1911; Ernst Stadler's *Der Aufbruch*, in which he welcomes war because it offers a hope of change, in 1913. (Stadler's English contemporary, T. E. Hulme, had a similar attitude to war, though based on different premises.)

GOTTFRIED BENN's first poems belong to this early phase of Expressionism; and his later development was strongly influenced, not to say determined, by a reaction against the excesses of the later Expressionists, but especially against that desperate optimism which took the form of political utopias. Gifted as he was, even Franz Werfel has an embarrassing habit of buttonholing his fellow men to assure them of his love; but the worst offender was J. R. Becher (born 1891), as frantic as he was prolific in those years. (Though another survivor, Becher has become a Communist Party man and has long ceased to write poems in any other capacity.) It must be mentioned in this connection that Benn reacted only against the dominant political ideology, that of the Left; in two essays of 1932 and 1933 he welcomed the extremists of the Right and tried to reconcile Expressionism with the new ideology. The gesture was not appreciated; Expressionism had already been condemned as "degenerate art." In 1937 Gottfried Benn himself was forbidden to publish and finally took refuge from his persecutors in the National Socialist Party by joining the Medical Corps of the Army (for which he had originally been trained, before going into private practice in Berlin as a specialist in skin and venereal diseases). It was then that Benn, always ready to make a virtue of necessity, coined his famous description of the Army as "the aristocratic form of emigration." As the aphorism implies, Benn had changed his mind about the Nazis. As for his conception of aristocracy, this will become clear when I come to deal with his beliefs in general.

I have deliberately refrained from defining Expressionism; for the work of those poets either actively or posthumously associated with the movement is so various that there is no point in reducing their practice to a single formula. Lichtenstein's ironic *collage* has already been described. Georg Heym and Georg Trakl were visionary poets whose strength was their lack of irony; whereas Heym wrote in strictly regular stanzas modelled on those of Stefan George, Trakl wrote mostly in a form of free verse that owes much to Hölderlin's classical cadences. Both used little imagery that was specifically modern, for their poetry is symbolic rather than descriptive. Ernst Stadler wrote in long irregular lines adapted from Walt Whitman, rarely in stanza form, but rhymed; much of his imagery is derived from modern urban life, for he remained closer to certain of his predecessors in the Naturalist movement. In these early years it was an older poet, August Stramm (1879–1915), who produced the wildest experiments in diction, syntax, and metric. When necessary, he coined new words to convey states of mind never before expressed; these, unlike the neologisms of Gottfried Benn, were not cerebral but emotive, purely expressive sounds, onomatopœic or pun-like. I shall quote his short poem *Schwermut*, though one of his more conventional pieces, because his work tells us so much about the period of Benn's formative years:

Schreiten Streben	Striding striving
Leben sehnt	Living longs
Schauern Stehen	Shuddering standing
Blicke suchen	Glances look for
Sterben wächst	Dying grows
Das Kommen	The coming
Schreit!	Screams!
Tief	Deeply
Stummen	We
Wir	Dumb

This poem contains no visual images, no adjectives, and only a single adverb. (The word corresponding to "dumb" is used neologistically as a verb.) It describes nothing but an inward state; but whereas Lichtenstein—and, in a very different way, Trakl—expresses an inward state by projecting it into an outward scene, here there is no reference to any recognisable object, person or place. Stramm suppresses outward reality, so that his poem conveys only

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movement, an inward gesture; it is an abstract pattern that corresponds to his inward state.

In his first poems, Gottfried Benn used a realistic technique for an expressionistic purpose—to convey disgust. In some of his later works—especially those of his middle period—he came as close as any poet to pure abstraction; outward reality, in those poems, provides only fragments which the poet assembles into a pattern. One must beware, of course, of applying the terms of graphic art to poetry; and I have avoided drawing parallels between individual poets and graphic artists. But during the Expressionist period, literature and the visual arts were uncommonly, perhaps unhealthily, close to each other. Kokoschka wrote Expressionist plays, Ernst Barlach both novels and plays. Very loosely, the distinction between abstraction and projection (or distortion) can be applied to both arts. Such artists as Klee—not to mention Picasso—used both abstraction and projection for different purposes; and the unstable relationship between outward and inward reality is what distinguishes every modern movement in art and poetry. Benn's hatred of the outside world was such that he attempted the complete disruption of this relationship. He has therefore done his best to avoid all the recognised symbols, especially those associated with religion, as these would have served to relate his work to the universal truths which he denies.

BENN's premises go back to two definitions by Nietzsche which he is fond of quoting: "The world as an æsthetic phenomenon" and "Art as the last metaphysical activity within European Nihilism." Gottfried Benn accepts this European Nihilism as one accepts the weather. In a recent interview he said: "When announcing your visit, you promised not to ask me whether I'm a Nihilist. Indeed, the question is just as meaningless as to ask me whether I'm a skater or a stamp collector. For the important thing is what one makes of one's Nihilism." Though it is not always clear exactly what Benn means by Nihilism, more often than not he uses the term to denote the negation of all absolute values; but, in later years especially, he speaks also of the "transcending of Nihilism," and this is done by setting up new values to take their place—much as Nietzsche spoke of the "revaluation of all values." Benn believes that Nihilism is the inevitable frame of mind of all those Europeans of the present age who have the courage to think; he never tires of expressing his contempt for those who "pretend" that the old values are more tenable than their substitutes, such as his own blend of scientific determinism and æstheticism. The reasons he gives for this determinism are partly biological, partly psychological—though he does not care for the word—and partly historical or political; he is convinced that "the white peoples are at the stage of egress, no matter whether the theories about their decline are considered valid today or not. . . . The race has become immobile, it remains fixed around its kernel, and this kernel is intellect, that is to say Nihilism." Here, as elsewhere, he simply equates Nihilism with a highly developed consciousness.

Benn goes one stage further than Nietzsche: "What distinguishes the situation of the man of 1940—the man concerned with intellectual questions and deductions—from Nietzsche's situation is, above all, that he has broken off relations with the public and with that pedagogic-cum-political sphere which Nietzsche's works, especially those of the eighties, passionately cultivated." In a section of his *Ausdruckswelt* (1949) headed "Pessimism," Benn elaborates on this theme of intellectual isolation: "Men are not lonely, but thinking is lonely. It is true that men are closely surrounded with mournful things, but many take part in this mourning and it is popular with everyone. But thinking is ego-bound and solitary." This, of course, depends on how one thinks; but for Benn there is no question of any other kind of thought. All his theories, whether æsthetic, metaphysical, or political, derive from his sense of the disharmony between inward and outward reality. "That which lives is something other than that which thinks," is how he formulates this basic dichotomy.

From the start, Benn's thinking was analytical rather than synthetic; while his contemporary Trakl wrote of the "image of man," he wrote of the body of man on the dissecting table.

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The bitterness of his early poem, *Lovely Childhood*, * is that of disillusionment; it contains no symbolism, though perhaps an implicit comparison with a poetic subject, the death of Ophelia:

The mouth of a girl who had long lain among the reeds looked gnawed away.
As the breast was cut open, the gullet showed full of holes.
Finally in a cavity below the diaphragm
a nest of young rats was discovered.
One little sister lay dead.
The others thrived on liver and kidneys,
drank the cold blood and
enjoyed a lovely childhood here.
And sweet and swift came their death also:
They were all thrown into the water together.
Oh, how the little muzzles squeaked!

There is a certain twisted sentimentality about *Negro's Bride*, † another of these early poems; as in most attempts at realism in lyrical poetry, the descriptive details are deceptive, for they serve to convey and arouse an emotion not at all intrinsic to the "phenomenon" described:

Then there lay bedded on cushions of dark blood
the very fair neck of a white woman.
The sun was furious with her hair
and slobbered her the length of her thighs
and knelt around her somewhat darker breasts,
undisfigured yet by vice and birth.
A nigger next to her: his eyes and forehead
mangled by a horse's hoof. He bored
two toes of his filthy left foot
into the inside of her small white ear.
She, however, lay and slept like a bride:
on the verge of her happiness, her first love,
and just as though on her way to many ascensions
of her youthful warm blood.
Until in her,
deep in her white throat, they sank the blade
and a rich purple apron of dead blood
was thrown around her hips.

This was the given reality—because Benn had chosen to be a doctor; but of course there was no more need for him to write about corpses than for T. S. Eliot to write about bank balances. It is not a question of what we know, but of how we place the things we know; whether, nihilistically, we see the phenomenon as isolated or as part of a larger reality which includes our own consciousness. Already a few years later, in his very personal prose pieces written during the First World War, Benn reacted against this given reality in a manner that was correspondingly extreme: outward reality suddenly ceased to exist. Benn's hero, the doctor Rönne, indulges in day dreams, æsthetic and erotic fantasies wholly divorced from his own situation. His ambition now is "to look for forms and bequeath himself." In an autobiographical sketch of 1934, Benn admits that the character of Rönne is based on his own; we should have guessed as much, as Benn has rarely written about anyone but himself. This is how he describes Rönne in retrospect: "The year 1914/15 in Brussels was enormous, it was then that Rönne was created, the doctor, the flagellant of individual objects, the bare vacuum of facts, Rönne who could not bear any reality, nor take any in, who knew only the rhythmic opening and shutting of the ego and the personality." In the same sketch Benn wrote of himself that "he was never free from this trance that there is no such thing as reality."

Benn's development after 1914 is a perpetual struggle between his ego and the external world. Total reality had been disposed of; all that remained was the isolated fact and the autonomous fantasy, the two principal components of his later poetry and prose.

THE following passage describes how Rönne first succumbs to the fascination of facts:

Now, there was a picture on the wall: a cow in a meadow. A cow in a meadow, he thought, a round, brown cow, the sky and a field. Ah, what ineffable bliss that picture gave him. There it stands on four legs, one, two, three, four legs, this is not to be denied; it stands on four legs in a meadow of grass, looking at three sheep, one, two, three sheep—the number! How I love numbers, they're so hard, they're so inviolable from every side, they bristle with unassailability, they're quite unambiguous, it would be ludicrous to find fault with them in any way. . . .

Rönne, though a scientist, seems to be

* "*Schöne Jugend*" from *Morgue* (1912). Translated by Babette Deutsch and A. Yarmolinsky: *Contemporary German Poetry*. John Lane. 1923.

† "*Negerbraut*." Translated by Edgar Lohner and Cid Corman. *Wake* No. 12, New York, 1953.

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unaware that numbers are symbols; and the fact that these animals appear on a painting does not lead him to question their formal function. He prefers to treat them as facts. This peculiar and deliberate short-sightedness suggests that Benn is right in calling himself a "pheno-type," that is, a representative of the mentality of the age. One can see the same division at work in the modern cult of statistics for statistics' sake—facts in a vacuum of unreality. And Benn's anti-humanism—which results from a similar refusal to see the whole reflected in the part—is precisely that of the modern totalitarian states, to whom human beings are either useful commodities or "phenomena" that lend themselves to interesting experiments. In the even more "realistic" poems that followed *Morgue*, Benn sees human beings as so much meat which, while alive, is also invested with a substance which he calls not "mind," but "brain." Since thinking is "lonely," there is no bond between one human being and another; only one's own ego is real, other people's, at best, are an abstraction.

Even the doctrine of Art for Art's sake—revived by Benn under the guise of *Artistik*—corresponds to the general process of fragmentation: it is work in a vacuum of unreality. "Works of art," according to Benn, "are phenomena, historically ineffective, without practical consequences. That is their greatness"; and "*Artistik* is the attempt of Art to experience itself as a meaning within the general decay of all meaning, and to form a new style out of this experience; it is the attempt of Art to oppose the general nihilism of values with a new kind of transcendence, the transcendence of creative pleasure. Seen in this way, the concept embraces all the problems of Expressionism, of abstract art, of anti-humanism, atheism, anti-historicism, of cyclicism, of the 'hollow man'—in short, all the problems of the world of expression" (1951).

Though Benn believes in "absolute prose" and "the absolute poem, the poem without faith, the poem without hope, the poem addressed to no one, the poem made of words which you assemble in a fascinating way," he can lapse into the sentimentality of saying that "poets are the tears of the nation" (1928). These words, significantly, occur in a tribute to a dead friend. A great many of Benn's poems are addressed to someone, but this someone is himself; I cannot see that his habit of talking to himself in the second person makes his poems any more absolute than they would be if he addressed the Muse or a girl friend. As it happens, one of Benn's recent collections, *Fragmente* (1951), contains a poem addressed to someone other than himself; this poem, *Blaue Stunde*, reads suspiciously like a love poem, and it is one of the best pieces in the collection.

In the course of the recent interview already cited, Benn asserts that "style is superior to truth"—an assertion already implied in his earlier and more drastic statement that "God is a bad stylistic principle"; but elsewhere he states that "God is form." This is one of the many blatant self-contradictions that can be traced back to Benn's egocentric habits of thought, for the first statement is a criticism of other people's work, the second a defence of his own. Once we have become aware of this peculiar dialectic, his arguments tend to cancel one another out. On p. 53 of *Ausdruckswelt* (1949), he argues that the State has no right to complain of the damage done by artists as long as it wages wars that kill off three million men in the space of three years; on page 107 he writes: "In my opinion, the West is not being destroyed by the totalitarian systems or the crimes of the SS, nor by its material impoverishment or its Gottwalds and Molotovs, but by the dog-like grovelling of its intellectuals before political concepts." As above, in the first instance Benn is thinking of intellectuals like himself under a régime hostile to them, in the second of intellectuals unlike himself in rather different circumstances. The real question—whether or not writers are responsible for what they write—has been clumsily evaded in both cases; the importance attached to their "grovelling" in the second instance would suggest that they are responsible if their views are different from Benn's.

BENN, of course, has had his share of misfortune; rather more than his share, perhaps, to judge by his attitude. "As an example

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of this generation," he writes in the preface to *Ausdruckswelt*. "I mention my own family: three of my brothers fell on the battlefield, a fourth was seriously wounded twice, the rest were totally bombed out, lost everything. My first cousin, the writer Joachim Benn, fell in the battle of the Somme, his only son in the last war; of this branch of the family nothing remains. I myself was continually on active service as a doctor in the following years: 1914 to 1918, 1939 to 1944. My wife died in 1945 in immediate connection with the events of the war." It is strange that Benn should choose to provide this information in the preface to a work in which he elaborates his anti-humanism and surveys the Nazi régime without troubling about any of its victims except a certain type of artist remarkably like himself. Judged by his own standards, his family's fate is of no account; if one sympathises, one must reject Benn's standards. Though he mentions his family as a mere "example" of his generation, no example is called for at all; and Benn is sufficiently *au fait* with statistics to have found a different example if he had cared to look for one. I mention this only because the question of sympathy arises frequently over Benn's prose works, strange mixture of fact and fantasy, speculation and self-confession that they are; and it is peculiarly irritating to be asked for sympathy on one page, only to have it violently rejected on the next, when the pervading mood of cynical or stoical toughness takes over from a passing mawkish one.

In this same indictment of National Socialism (written in 1941, published in 1949), Benn confines himself to criticising its lack of "style" and its lack of sympathy for the independent artist; never once does he suggest that this lack of style may be connected with fear and hatred of the truth and with a dual morality not altogether different from his own. This, of course, would be to criticise some of his own premises; and Benn simply will not admit the possibility that he himself could ever have been in the wrong. Writing of Berlin in 1947, he describes the ruined city, its starving population, and the luxuries imported by the occupation forces; and goes on: ". . . The population looks on greedily through the windows: culture is advancing again, little murder, more song and rhythm. Inwardly, too, the defeated are well provided for: a transatlantic bishop arrives and murmurs: my brothers;—a humanist appears and chants: the Occident;—a tenor wheedles: O lovely Art—the reconstruction of Europe is in progress."

Gottfried Benn's attitude has not changed since the twenties when he wrote:

die Massenglücke	mass pleasures, mass joy
sind schon tränennah,	are close to tears,
bald ist die Lücke	already a gap clears
für die Trance da	for trance to break through

Apart from the modern vocabulary, this is the "aristocratic" attitude struck by so many of the 19th century æsthetes in defiance of a bourgeois society still smugly secure; this was a good reason for being provocative. To adopt the same attitude to Berlin in 1947 is neither original nor interesting; it is merely one of many occasions where a shoddy philosophy causes Benn to lapse into bad taste—and it shows up the puerility of his claim that "style is superior to truth." Benn is Baudelaire's dandy up-to-date; he also "*ne sort jamais de soi-même.*" But the dandy was only one of Baudelaire's personæ; Baudelaire was also the "*homme des foules*" who could lose himself in others and complete himself. Benn's chief limitation is that nearly all his thinking is determined by a reaction against one thing or another—against literary or ideological fashions, against the vulgar or against his own impulses; but reaction is only a different sort of dependence. To be always sneering at the vulgar is a sort of vulgarity.

With few exceptions, then—the essay on *Goethe and the Natural Sciences* is an outstanding one—Benn's critical writings are not an exploration of other minds, but comments on his own practice and justifications of his own attitude. The acute self-awareness that goes with self-division has enabled him to write brilliantly about the creative process as experienced by himself (in *Probleme der Lyrik*, 1951). His belief in "absolute poetry"—that is, in poetry as an end to be pursued for its own sake, without any didactic intention—has had the very positive effect of opposing the

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tendency, still very widespread in Germany, to think that poetry is only a matter of expressing sublime sentiments in regular stanzas. Benn's "absolute poetry" and "absolute prose," of course, will never be written; for words have a habit of conveying meaning, and Benn makes no allowance for this function. *Artistik*, in fact, is a fallacy, because when a work of art is made public it has the practical consequence of being a means of communication, as well as its essential function of merely existing as "Significant Form" (and even form is *significant*, even when we prefer not to say of what). If Benn did not wish to communicate anything, he would keep his work to himself; and he would not bother to explain the creative process to others or to defend his own theories with such stubborn persistence. Recently he has even found it necessary to assure his readers that he is human by writing an account of his "dual life" (*Doppelleben*); here the difficulty of reconciling his two selves—the conscientious doctor and the amoral artist—has proved insuperable and involved him in arguments too silly and too casuistic to bear repetition. Benn himself summed up the dilemma when he said of his generation: "We lived something different from what we were, we wrote something different from what we thought, we thought something different from what we expected, and what remains is something different from what we intended" (1949).

So much for Benn's theories. In trying to sum them up, I may have simplified them unduly, encouraged by Benn's own weakness for epigrams. Preposterous as some of his statements may seem, they proceed from premises implicit in the work and conduct of many who would hesitate to adopt Benn's attitude; it needs perversity, desperation, and a certain moral courage—as well as a characteristically German addiction to extremes—to push them to their absurd conclusions. Benn, at least, does not pretend that he is on the side of the angels. At the same time, it is easy to identify cynicism with honesty and hence with truthfulness; this is not a logical progression, for one can be cynical without being honest, and honest without having any capacity for truthfulness. Not so much because he prefers style to truth—a preference not borne out by his practice and based on a false antithesis in any case—as because of his unhappy relationship with outward reality, Benn excels at the aphoristic half-truth. Stimulating as they often are, Benn's utterances tend to point back to his own situation; and their final effect is to make one feel rather glad that poets are only the unacknowledged legislators of humanity.

BENN's beliefs, unfortunately, cannot be disregarded in considering his creative work. Though his achievement, too, is something different from what he intended, the greater part of his poetry moves within the dialectic of Nihilism. In view of the great value he attaches to Art, one might expect his poetry to be of the consistently high quality of—say—Mallarmé's, Valéry's, or Stefan George's; but in fact even Benn's æsthetic standards are extraordinarily unreliable. All his collections of poetry—but especially the more recent ones—contain pieces that are not only grossly inferior to his best work, but simply unformed—cerebral jottings in loose free verse or mechanical rhyme that all too clearly communicate something: Benn's preoccupation with himself and with ideas that are not realised poetically. The feebleness of such poems as *Satzbau* and *Ideelles Weiterleben?* from his recent collection *Fragmente* (1951) has as much to do with truth as with style; here is a short extract from the latter:

Dabei ging täglich so viel bei dir durch
Introvertiert, extrovertiert
Nahrungssorgen, Ehewidrigkeit, Steuermoral—
mit allem musstest du dich befassen,
ein gerüttelt Mass von Leben in mancherlei Gestalt . . .

Yet daily so much passed through you
Introverted, extroverted
money troubles, marriage vexations, tax morality—
with all these you had to concern yourself,
a full measure of life in many a shape . . .

The reason why these—and many similar lines—are feeble is that they say something which Benn would not think worth saying if he took himself less seriously and did not feel himself to be an isolated ego. Benn's excessive self-pity—unredeemed by pity for others—proceeds

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from this sense of isolation; it is even more detrimental to his verse than to his prose. What is lacking in such pieces is the true creative flash; and this creative flash cannot be had without contact, contact with the Muse, with the *anima mundi* or whatever we wish to call the reality that fuses with the poet's consciousness. Benn himself went to the crux of the matter in this passage from his preface to *Ausdruckswelt*, one of the few in which he modifies his earlier views: "Nihilism as the negation of history, actuality, affirmation of life, is a great quality, but as the negation of reality itself it means a diminution of the ego."

Ex nihilo nihil; Benn's state of mind is one which could well be utterly uncreative. (I say "state of mind" because to call Nihilism a philosophy or a creed would be a contradiction in terms.) It is difficult to conceive how anyone can affirm reality without affirming life, unless by life he means only some particular manifestation of life, an accepted mode of existence or a hostile environment. The poems of Benn's best period, the early twenties, include many that are almost excellent, but only a few are proof against the intrusion of irrelevant ideas and inessential "phenomena." These ideas may be expressed in words specially minted by Benn; but this does not prevent them from being slogans, superior and clever ones, but abstract and therefore unpoetic. I am thinking of such new compound words as *Bewusstseinsträger* (consciousness-bearer), *Satzbordell* (sentence brothel) and *Tierschutzmäzene* (Maecenases of the RSPCA) or of technical terms such as *Selbsterreger* (auto-exciter). The intrusion of these words reduces much of Benn's most original work to the level of intellectual journalism; they stand for something that has not been experienced, but thought out. They are cerebral without being drunken (the phrase *trunken cerebral* occurs in one of these poems). Like all slogans, they are either lies or half-truths; and they spring from a consciousness divided against itself.

It is this basic self-division that assumes the guise of a conflict between inward and outward reality, between subject and object. When the conflict becomes too acute, the mind cries out for its own dissolution or for the destruction of the world. In the poems of this period, Benn more frequently dwells on the second possibility; but the two, of course, are complementary. The strange fact is that where Benn's extreme mental stress finds its exact counterpart in visions of cosmic destruction, his poems become wholly formed and essentially positive. The barrier breaks down. Since complete Nihilism is not humanly possible, these very visions become an affirmation of life, if only of a "biological" force which is indestructible. I shall quote one of Benn's most successful poems of this period, from the collection *Spaltung* (1925). Like all Benn's best poems, it is not really translatable; rough and wholly inadequate as it is, the accompanying version must be read only as an aid to the appreciation of Benn's own poem:

PALAU

"Rot ist der Abend auf der Insel von Palau
und die Schatten sinken—"
singe, auch aus den Kelchen der Frau
lässt es sich trinken,
Totenvögel schrein
und die Totenuhren
pochen, bald wird es sein
Nacht und Lemuren.

Heisse Riffe. Aus Eukalypten geht
Tropik und Palmung,
was sich noch hält und steht,
will auch Zermalmung
bis in das Gliederlos,
bis in die Leere,
tief in den Schöpfungsschoss
dämmernder Meere.

rot ist der Abend auf der Insel von Palau
und im Schattenschimmer
hebt sich steigend aus Dämmer und Tau:
"Niemals und Immer";
alle Tode der Welt
sind Fähren und Furten,
und von Fremdem umstellt
auch deine Geburten—

einmal mit Opferfett
auf dem Piniengerüste
trägt sich dein Flammenbett
wie Wein zur Küste,
Megalithen zuhauf
und die Gräber und Hallen,
Hammer des Thor im Lauf
zu den Asen zerfallen—

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wie die Götter vergehn
und die grossen Cäsaren,
von der Wange des Zeus
emporgefahren—
singe, wandert die Welt
schon in fremdestem Schwunge,
schmeckt uns das Charonsgeld
längst unter der Zunge—

Paarung. Dein Meer belebt
Sepien, Korallen,
was such noch hält und schwebt,
will auch zerfallen,
rot ist der Abend auf der Insel von Palau,
Eukalyptenschimmer
hebt in Runen aus Dämmer und Tau:
Niemals und Immer.

"Evening is red on the island of Palau
and the shadows sink—"
sing, from woman's chalices too
it is good to drink,
deathly the little owls cry
and the death-watch ticks out
very soon it will be
Lemures and night.

Hot these reefs. From eucalypti there flows
a tropical palm concoction,
all that still holds and stays
also longs for destruction
down to the limbless stage,
down to the vacuum,
back to the primal age,
dark ocean's womb.

Evening is red on the island of Palau
in the gleam of these shadows
there issues rising from twilight and dew:
"Never and Always";
all the deaths of the earth
are fords and ferries,
what to you owes its birth
surrounded with strangeness—

once with sacrificial
fat on the pine-wood floor
your bed of flames would travel
like wine to the shore,
megaliths heaped around
and the graves and the halls,
hammer of Thor that's bound
for the Aesir, crumbled, falls—

as the gods surcease,
the great Cæsars decline,
from the cheek of Zeus
once raised up to reign—
sing, already the world
to the strangest rhythm is swung,
Charon's coin, if not curled,
long tasted under the tongue—

Coupling. Sepias your seas
and coral animate,
all that still holds and sways
also longs to disintegrate,
evening is red on the island of Palau,
eucalyptus glaze
raises in runes from twilight and dew:
Never and Always.

It is certainly true to say of this poem that it transcends Nihilism, as any sustained creative act is bound to do; but I believe that Benn is mistaken in postulating a creative act that affirms no values other than æsthetic ones. This poem would not be successful if Benn had not believed in it while he wrote it—with his senses, certainly, but with his intellect as well.

Benn's best poems succeed in spite of his intentions—because he cannot keep reality out of them. He can be indifferent to the meaning of his poetry and to its impact on others; he can disclaim responsibility for it on the grounds that he has no other purpose than to express or to please himself; but he cannot prevent the fragmentary fact and the autonomous image from turning into symbols. He can banish himself to an island, but he cannot make that island vanish from the universe.

In other words, Nihilism is incompatible with Art, though it is compatible with many of those unformed or half-formed products that pass for works of art. As Benn's recent work shows, poetry cannot go further than—or even as far as—pure abstraction in painting; the next stage would be the empty canvas and the blank page, the best possible expressions of Nihilism, and the most honest. The stage after that calls for a different sort of courage: the courage to turn back and, as far as possible, to begin again with the rudiments. Whether he likes it or not, Benn has entered this stage, a stage more difficult than any other. The danger, once more, is reaction, the temptation to fall

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into a false primitivism or a stale neo-classicism. No æsthetic programme is of any use at this stage; what is needed is a greater readiness to see, hear, and feel, instead of an arrogant preoccupation with one's own intellect. This, of course, is more easily said than done—everything is against it; but the alternative is Benn's "progressive cerebralisation" carried to the point where art ends and thought becomes an affliction. If Benn's biological determinism is right, artists have no more choice than the doomed civilisation to which they belong; if, as I am sure, it is wrong, Benn's explorations will not have been in vain. No one will wish to follow him all the way; but he has written the "six or eight consummate poems" which he believes to be all a contemporary lyrical poet can achieve; and, more often than not, even his failures have the fascination of uninhabitable regions.

Patric Dickinson

Ullswater

Beside the lake the lovers
Had pitched their green tent,
And sweet they were to see
As the bright day wound
The hills with shadow.
Now it was time to go.

O hardly could he bear
To draw her image
From its palace in the lake,
And so he held her close
And kissed her lips in trance
Though they were both awake.

Then with glad grace they moved
As in a dance
To loose a rope and turn
To lift a peg and turn
To love's repeated figure:
At last the pole was down

And all was stowed away
Into the panniers
Of their motorbike, but still
They could not go. Nearby
Two children on a rock
Cockcrowed to wake the hills,

That stirred and in a flash
Had the flesh off their bones
And the bones ground to dust;
Then threw them back the voices
Of their own children, years
Unborn. It was time to go.

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Sacheverell Sitwell

Ballad: Lines to a Succubus

(the conclusion of a long poem)

A NYMPH enters,
The nymph Nausicaa in the lonely tower,
And noiselessly
Crosses the floor into the wings.
Ah! What is it to pick a camellia from the wall
And hold it in the moonbeams,
For a camellia is scentless!
Just so, the nymph Nausicaa,
Like a moonbeam in the middle of the night
Noiseless, moves down the moonlight,
Which follows her, or so it seems to me,
And waits for her;
Nymph Nausicaa, night-hyacinth,
Let me be alone to talk to you!
Night-blowing Cereus,
The clock points to early morning
And I am caught between the living and the dead,
With no hope of either!
One is told, often, one never dreams of the dead.
It is a lie. Last night I dreamt of you, and heard your voice,
And I know I can break the dream, and go on dreaming of you:
But another nymph, instead of you, is in the lonely tower tonight
Her with slanting eyes
And cheeks that are like green apples;
Her waist, no "rose-stem without thorns,"
But as the stem of the water-lily,
All smooth and silent in the moonlight.
Nymph! With hair that combs like feathers,
Bending lily-stem; what are you miming?
Bird-girl! Faunness! Stooping at the rosin-box
As though you had ribbons at your ankle;
O moonlit ghost of the rose Belle-Isis
Rose which grows in the shape of a dancer's *tutu*.
Twice in my life I heard the fanfare from the high tower,
Played on the trumpet,
In Cracow, where were the schools of magic:
Come now, "blasphemer, and nigromancian,"
Play me another turn!
I have known the ghost in the white currant bushes:
That of the fair Venetian,
And her with eyes like the auricula:
Give me the nymph Nausicaa, for herself,
Princess of the Jackdaws,
Faunness! With green cheeks like apples . . .

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Men and Ideas

J. M. Cameron: WALTER BAGEHOT

ALL THE great political problems of our time group themselves round the problem of totalitarianism. The chief instance of totalitarianism is the Soviet Union with its dependencies; but the shadow of National Socialism still falls across the imagination; and we may suspect that totalitarianism has many faces and that an obsessive preoccupation with Soviet Communism may in the end lead us into the trap of another totalitarianism. The concern in Western Europe over the activities of Senator McCarthy is prompted by the fear—no doubt without much ground—that the free society of the United States may, through a vast and tragic blunder, stumble into totalitarianism.

To escape totalitarianism, one should cultivate good principles and take them seriously—so runs the unspoken argument. And a special sub-species of this argument continues:—If universal suffrage and free education are the birthright of the British citizen, then it is hypocritical to deny them to the inhabitants of Kenya or British Guiana. If you believe in human equality, then you are committed to thinking it wrong for individual parents to spend part of their incomes in purchasing educational advantages for their children. Be bold and unambiguous in the application of the principles of the free society: or the demons of totalitarianism will catch you and tear you to pieces; and you will deserve your fate.

It is perfectly true that the most important difference between totalitarian and free societies is one of principle. The directing agencies of society—the family, the city, the church, the school, the workshop, and above all the state—are only justifiable as means to the good life for individual persons. In a totalitarian society some of these agencies are treated as though they were ends to which individual persons and smaller groupings within the state must be subordinated. This is to deny the plainest of rational principles. The life of gluttony is irrational, for in it we live to eat. It would be irrational to have a house in which chairs were not to be sat in, beds not to be slept in, so that these articles of furniture could be kept in mint condition. A totalitarian society is similarly irrational. There is a kind of rationality in the conduct of the *rulers* of a totalitarian society; they satisfy their appetites for power or luxury through their control over the directing agencies of society. If we ask why it is irrational to sacrifice the good of most people to the satisfactions of the few, we are driven back upon certain ultimate principles of human nature and social life which we perceive to be obligatory and the source of all social values. These principles are the premisses of our polemic against totalitarianism; and they are more or less adequately expressed in the idea of the *Rechtstaat*, the state in which the rule of law is observed and in which the legal system is controlled by moral norms and not ordinarily distorted by *raison d'Etat*.

SO FAR, so good. But the application of these principles is an art. Societies are immensely various; there is no one set of institutions and social practices which is *the* correct application of these principles; the clear white light of principle is of necessity refracted in the dense medium of social life. Dissatisfaction with ambiguity in the application of these principles may provoke two errors: a cynicism which

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holds that since the principles can never be unambiguously embodied in a single set of institutions, one may as well abandon the game, scrap the rules; and a romanticism which believes that some one radical change—a new kind of education, the abolition of private ownership, a return to primitive modes of production, or what have you—will unambiguously marry principles to performance. Now, both these errors lead directly to policies which issue in totalitarianism. Indeed, romanticism and cynicism in politics are two sides of the same penny. Robespierre, Talleyrand—we are not here faced with conflicting philosophies of society but with the romantic and cynical sides of the same movement.

It is plain that the free societies of Britain and the United States, Holland and Switzerland, to mention only some notable examples, have been preserved because they have continuously purged themselves of these errors; and they have done so through a command of the art of politics. The principles of this art are more difficult to state than the major premisses of the free society; but they are of equal moment, for to cleave to the major premisses and to lose the art of applying them is the perfect formula for ineptitude in politics. A few writers have had an exceptional insight into the principles of this art; Burke and Tocqueville are brilliant examples. Another writer, not quite in this supreme class, but with something like this insight, is Walter Bagehot.*

Bryce wrote of him that "had he lived . . . he might have exercised almost the same kind of influence that Montesquieu exerted in the middle of the 18th, and Tocqueville in the earlier part of the 19th century"; and Woodrow Wilson wrote that "he had the social imagination that Burke had, and Carlyle."

"The most interesting man in London to talk to," as Bryce thought him, Bagehot sprang from a comfortable corner of the English middle class. His father, a solemn and learned man, a Unitarian, was managing director of one of the great provincial private banks. His mother, deeply influenced by the Tractarian movement, was charming, impulsive, gifted; her later life was a deepening tragedy of occasional mental derangement. From his father Bagehot inherited a respect for fact, great shrewdness, and a touch of nonconformity; from his mother came the ardent temperament and the flashing wit that give his published writings their energy and their muscular and incisive quality and that make the letters he wrote during his courtship of Eliza Wilson (the daughter of James Wilson, the proprietor of *The Economist*) among the most engaging in the language. He owed to his father's nonconformity an education at University College, London. He thus escaped the storm and stress of the religious movements that were shaking the older universities, and he always preserved towards the High Church Anglicanism of his mother an ironical, though affectionate, detachment.

Bagehot's marriage in 1858 to Eliza Wilson gave him the entry to the most influential political circles in London, as well as to the editorship of *The Economist* which he used as a pulpit until his death in 1877. He was not politically ambitious and he was unlucky in his attempts to enter the House of Commons; but he valued immensely the opportunity to scrutinise at first hand the play of power and the making of policy. Shortly after his marriage he wrote: "Living really in the political world is the greatest possible gain in a political country, knowing at first hand what others know at second hand only, the characters and the play of political life are not otherwise accessible."

BAGEHOT was not a writer with a system. He wrote: "Nothing is such a bore as looking for your principles—nothing so pleasant as working them out." And: "The bane of philosophy is pomposity." He was almost morbidly afraid of canting or preaching. The value of his writings lies in their perception of the concrete tasks and specific limits of men engaged in the art of politics. He had in a singular degree the power of direct vision in social matters. His vision of the social situation was relatively undistorted by the prejudices of his class and age, and he put down what he saw incisively and, sometimes, with a touch of brutality. He grasped at once the master function of a social institution and the conditions necessary for the fulfilment of this function.

* His most important writings on politics are *Letters on the French Coup d'Etat of 1851* (1852), *The English Constitution* (1867)—a revised edition with an important Introduction was published in 1872—and *Physics and Politics* (1872).

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This directness of vision was not laboriously acquired. It is brilliantly exemplified in the early *Letters on the French Coup d'Etat of 1851*. Bagehot had the great good fortune to be in Paris in 1851. A combination of pleasure with physical danger always excited him—Mrs. Russell Barrington, his sister-in-law, has left us a vivid picture of Bagehot clambering in a frenzy of excitement on the cliffs of the Isle of Wight during a violent storm; and in Paris he combined going to dances with wandering among the barricades and trying to rent a window from which he could view the battle of the streets. But he remained a cool and capable observer and never lost his sense of the ridiculous in himself and in others. He notes that "it is a bad habit to run in a Revolution, somebody may think you are 'the other side' and shoot at you, but if you go calmly and look English, there is no particular danger." The maturity of his perception in political matters, even at this age—he was twenty-four—is well brought out in the following passage:

> I think all sensible Englishmen who review this history [i.e. French history since 1789] will not be slow to divine a conclusion peculiarly agreeable to our orderly national habits, viz., that the first want of the French is somebody or something able and willing to keep down street-rows, to repress the frightful elements of revolution and disorder which, every now and then, astonish Europe; capable of maintaining, and desirous to maintain, the order and tranquillity which are (all agree) the essential and primary pre-requisites of industry and civilization. If any one seriously and calmly doubts this, I am afraid nothing that I can further say will go far in convincing him. But let him read the account of any scene in any French revolution, old or new, or better let him come here and learn how people look back to the time I have mentioned (to June, 1848), when the Socialists,—not under speculative philosophers like Proudhon or Louis Blanc, but under practical rascals and energetic murderers, like Sobrier and Caussidière,—made their last and final stand, and against them, on the other side, the National Guard (mostly solid shop-keepers, three-parts ruined by the events of February) fought (I will not say bravely or valiantly, but) furiously, frantically, savagely, as one reads in old books that half-starved burgesses in beleaguered towns have sometimes fought, for the food of their children; let any sceptic hear of the atrocities of the friends of order, and the atrocity of the advocates of disorder, and he will, I imagine, no longer be sceptical on two points,—he will hope that if he ever has to fight it will not be with a fanatic Socialist, nor against a demi-bankrupt fighting for "his shop"; and he will admit, that in a country subject to collisions between two such excited and excitable combatants, no earthly blessing is in any degree comparable to a power which will stave off, long delay, or permanently prevent the actual advent and ever-ready apprehension of such bloodshed.

There is, of course, a failure of sympathy here. But he magnificently shocks us into seeing what a revolution is really like.

Again, there is the celebrated opening paragraph of the chapter on "The Monarchy" in *The English Constitution*:

> The use of the Queen, in a dignified capacity, is incalculable. Without her in England, the present English Government would fail and pass away. Most people when they read that the Queen walked on the slopes at Windsor—that the Prince of Wales went to the Derby—have imagined that too much thought and prominence were given to little things. But they have been in error; and it is nice to trace how the actions of a retired widow and an unemployed youth become of such importance.

Here are the directness of vision and the touch of brutality—the veils of sentiment are ripped down with some enjoyment. He sees that if we are seriously to discuss the social function of the Monarchy we have to move outside the formal problem defined by the constitutional lawyers to the energy which the institution draws from the popular imagination; and his subsequent discussion of the Monarchy—its intelligibility, its roots in common human nature ("a princely marriage is the brilliant edition of a universal fact"), its consecration of the duty of obedience, its "mystery"—is pioneering work in the study of political mythology.

PHYSICS AND POLITICS, Bagehot's most ambitious and systematic work on politics, is the least satisfactory of his writings. It belongs far more irretrievably to its period than does *The English Constitution*. The reason is plain: here Bagehot goes outside the world he knows—the world of the City of London and parliamentary politics—and, taking his biology from Darwin and Wallace, his physiology from Huxley, his anthropology from Tylor, his psychology from Maudsley, his history from Freeman, he attempts to construct a science of politics. He applies the Darwinian hypothesis of Natural Selection to the evolution of human societies, and argues that "as every great scientific conception tends to advance its boundaries and to be of use in solving problems

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not thought of when it was started, so here, what was put forward for mere animal history may, with a change of form, but an identical essence, be applied to human history. . . . Everyone now admits that human history is guided by certain laws. . . ." The conclusion is that those societies which survive are fittest to survive, not only in the sense that those who survive, survive—an unilluminating tautology—but also in the sense that the surviving societies are the best quite apart from their being the best at surviving. He asks

> in what a village of Australian colonists is superior to a tribe of Australian natives who roam about them. Indisputably in one, and that a main sense, they are superior. They can beat the Australians in war when they like. . . . Nor is this all. Indisputably in the English village there are more means of happiness, a greater accumulation of the instruments of enjoyment, than in the Australian tribe. The English have all manner of books, utensils, and machines which the others do not use, value, or understand. And in addition, and beyond particular inventions, there is a general strength which is capable of being used in conquering a thousand difficulties, and is an abiding source of happiness, because those who possess it always feel that they can use it.
>
> If we omit [!] the higher but disputed topics of morals and religion, we shall find, I think, that the plainer and agreed-on superiorities of the Englishmen are these: first, that they have a greater command over the powers of nature upon the whole. . . . Secondly, that this power is not external only; it is also internal. The English do not only possess better machines for moving nature, but are themselves better machines. . . . Thirdly, civilised man not only has greater powers over nature, but knows better how to use them, and by better I here mean better for the health and comfort of his present body and mind.

This is sad stuff. To set aside problems of valuation ("morals and religion") is to pretend that we are faced with a problem that can be solved by taking an inventory. But nobody denies that

> *we have got*
> *The Maxim gun and they have not.*

Such a concept as "health of body and mind" is not an empirical concept like "cancer" or "fallen arches." If we say that the mind of the SS man who uses all the resources of transport and chemistry to murder Jews is "unhealthy," we are passing judgement, not pointing to a feature which is on all fours with the colour of his hair and the kind of fountain-pen he uses. Bagehot is here making (highly disputable) value judgements; but he confuses the making of value judgements with the drawing up of an inventory and thus fails to see that his judgement *can* be disputable. No one disputes over an inventory, unless it is inaccurate.

This is only a particular example of a logical confusion running through *Physics and Politics*. There are, as well, serious mistakes of fact and interpretation. His biology, physiology, anthropology, psychology, history, are only as good as the sciences of his authorities. No doubt there were none better to be had at the time. But Bagehot's errors here are of the kind which always occur when the hypotheses of the natural scientist, the anthropologist, or the historian are treated as straightforward factual statements. For example, Bagehot takes it as a fact and not a hypothesis that acquired characteristics are inherited; and he concludes from this that particular groups of men—nations, civilised men as distinct from savages—are not only distinct in respect to their traditions but also have a different psychical inheritance from other groups. Again, he holds (following Freeman) that Romans, Greeks, and Teutons are branches of a single Aryan stock possessing a native aptitude for the best forms of political government.

All the same, how excellent much of *Physics and Politics* is! Perhaps the best thing in it is the account of "government by discussion." Bagehot derived from Sir Henry Maine the notion of the revolutionary character of the change from a society relations within which are governed by status to one founded upon contract between legally free and equal persons. (It is not accidental that in ages when this change takes place—in the age of the Sophists in classical Greece, in the 17th century in England—the myth of the primeval social contract flourishes.) He looks with favour on the change; but, unlike many of his contemporaries, he sees that the vast ages during which relations were determined by status were important formative periods in the history of civilisation; and that a free society is a fragile work of art only to be preserved by a combination of intelligence and moral courage. He writes that "the change from the age of status to the age of choice was first made in states where the government was to a great

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and growing extent a government by discussion, and where the subjects of that discussion were . . . abstract . . . matters of principle."

Discussion of common interests in a free society is "the root of change and progress." The "cake of custom" is broken and men are able to see life with a fresh eye, to weigh alternatives and choose between them. Discussion is also a remedy for the diseases to which a free society will be prone, especially the disease of hastily improvised action—the solutions of the terrible *simplificateurs* who rise up when the score of revolution is marked *crescendo*—in situations that are complex, many-sided. It was precisely this delaying function of discussion which was abhorred by Carlyle, who thought parliamentary debate ignoble in a people who were once so fortunate as to be ruled by Puritan generals. Bagehot writes of those who decry the role of discussion in government:

> Their great enemy is parliamentary government; they call it, after Mr. Carlyle, the "national palaver"; they add up the hours that are consumed in it, and the speeches which are made in it, and they sigh for a time when England might again be ruled, as it once was, by a Cromwell—that is, when an eager, absolute man might do exactly what other eager men wished, and do it immediately. All these invectives are perpetual and many-sided; they come from philosophers, each of whom wants some new scheme tried; from philanthropists, who want some evil abated; from revolutionists, who want some old institution destroyed; from new eraists, who want their new era started forthwith. And they all are distinct admissions that a polity of discussion is the greatest hindrance to the inherited mistake of human nature, to the desire to act promptly, which in a simple age is so excellent, but which in a later and complex time leads to so much evil.

It is curious that Bagehot, who was so clear on the delaying function of parliamentary debate and on the usefulness of delay in a complex society with many divergent individual and corporate interests, should have failed to grasp the rationale of the American Constitution. He suggests, in *The English Constitution*, that conflicts between the President and Congress are a sign that what is well-managed in England—the harmony of Executive and Legislature, established by the device of Cabinet Government—is ill-managed in the United States. He forgets that the tension between President and Congress also has a delaying function not without its uses; and that such delay is inevitable and often desirable in a federal State. Whatever Bagehot's defects when he theorises at too great a distance from the actual life of politics, his practical judgements are rarely so badly out as in this case.

Always have regard to the facts of social life. Never forget that politics are a teasingly difficult art. Remember that a free society is a rare thing in human history and hangs by a thread. If the legislature is ineffective and men settle their political differences in the street, a strong executive that will destroy liberty is the only remedy (Bagehot never forgot the lesson of Louis Napoleon's *coup d'Etat*). Institutions are shifting things, to be tried and adjusted to the shifting conditions of a mutable world. Such are some of Bagehot's reiterated counsels. Such counsels, rather than the systematic doctrine attempted in *Physics and Politics*, contain the pith of what he has to say.

Was Bagehot in his most precious writings a mere empiricist, acute and witty, a Machiavelli who took as his political datum not the tyranny of Renaissance Italy but the partly aristocratic, partly plutocratic, parliamentary régime of mid-Victorian England? In an age, such as our own, of state-organised wickedness of a kind quite beyond the range even of Bagehot's powerful imagination, we may have a duty to lay bare and to urge with some vehemence principles he could afford to assume without discussion. It is true, he was not self-conscious about his moral principles. His view of religion tended to be a little arid; he, who perceived so clearly the role of mystery in social life, was not easy with irreducible mysteries in speculation. He had a tight, neat mind which would not have been out of place or uneasy in the age of the Enlightenment. But now and again there erupts a sentiment, a thrust of moral inflexibility, a generous passion that a superficial regard would never discover in the sharp and knowledgeable Editor of *The Economist*. No doubt the superficial crust hardened in middle life. When he was twenty he wrote to Sir Edward Fry:

> The most hopeful sign of our times is seeing men like Burns and Ebenezer Elliott showing the falsity of that scale of merit, that is graduated according to property, and making the rich to know that there are richer than they.

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In the following passage from the last of the 1951 *Letters* the generous passion is unmistakable:

> Four years ago, Europe was in a ferment with the newest ideas, the best theories, the most elaborate, the most artistic constitutions. There was the labour, and trouble, of a million intellects, as good, taken as a whole, as the world is likely to see,—of old statesmen and literary gentlemen, and youthful enthusiasts, all over Europe, from the Baltic sea to the Mediterranean, from the frontiers of Russia to the Atlantic Ocean. Well, what have we gained? A Parliament in Sardinia! Surely this is a lesson against proposing politics which won't work, convening assemblies that can't legislate, constructing executives that aren't able to keep peace, founding constitutions inaugurated with tears and eloquence, soon abandoned with tears and shame; beginning a course of fair auguries and liberal hopes, but from whose real dangers and actual sufferings a frightened and terrified people, in the end, flee for a temporary, or may be a permanent, refuge under a military and absolute ruler.

Bagehot's feeling for common men comes out in this passage. Politics exist that men may live the daily round in security. Bagehot laughed a good deal at human stupidity yet thought it a necessary ingredient in a well-ordered community. Occasionally what he writes is twaddle of a rather wounding and disagreeable sort, as in *Physics and Politics*:

> . . . if men differ in anything they differ in the fineness and delicacy of their moral intuitions. . . . We need not go as far as savages to learn that lesson; we need only talk to the English poor or to our own servants and we shall be taught it very completely. The lower classes in civilized countries, like all classes in uncivilized countries, are clearly wanting in the nicer part of those feelings which, taken together, we call the *sense* of morality.

Beati pauperes. Poor Bagehot. But on the whole he is better than this. In his essay on Shakespeare there is an excellent passage:

> If everyone were logical and literary, how would there be scavengers, or watchmen, or caulkers, or coopers? Narrow minds will be subdued to what they "work in." The "dyer's hand" will not more clearly carry off its tint, nor will what is moulded more precisely indicate the confines of the mould. A patient sympathy, a kindly fellow-feeling for the narrow intelligence necessarily induced by narrow circumstances . . . this, though quick and half-bred minds may despise it, seems to be a necessary constituent in the composition of manifold genius. "How shall the world be served?" asks the host in Chaucer. We must have cart-horses as well as race-horses, draymen as well as poets. It is no bad thing, after all, to be a slow man and to have one idea a year. You don't make a figure, perhaps, in argumentative society, which requires a quicker species of thought, but is that the worse?

THERE is some danger that under totalitarian pressure we shall neglect the plainest lessons of our political experience; that Soviet gibes and the forbidding spectacle of Dr. Malan's administration in South Africa will drive us into ill-considered policies both at home and in the Commonwealth. We are greatly mistaken if we think that our main duty, faced with the enmity of a variety of doctrinaires and ideologues, lies in the mechanical application, without regard to circumstances, of our own doctrine. There is a necessary casuistry of politics as well as of morals; and the application of principles to particular cases is an art which demands that respect for the concrete, that familarity with men and affairs as they really are, that perception of the greatness and the perils of life in a free society which inform the best of Bagehot's writings and give them a high place in our political tradition. He was a very young man when he wrote that

> a nation which applies good judgment, forbearance, a rational and compromising habit to the management of free institutions, will certainly succeed; while the more eminently gifted national character [Bagehot has the French in mind] will but be a source and germ of endless and disastrous failure, if, with whatever other eminent qualities, it be deficient in these plain, solid, and essential requisites.

It is his merit that he never lost this vision of good sense in politics; and went on expounding it in writings that still keep their freshness, their astringent charm, and their power to teach.

This inaugurates a series of essays on "Men and Ideas." Future contributors will include H. R. Trevor Roper (Erasmus), W. H. Auden (Tocqueville), Gertrude Himmelfarb (Mill), Irving Kristol (Machiavelli), and others.

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POSTCARD FROM CORNWALL

Now the world comes alive in a clarity of marvels
I dream of space and distance and possibles.
I send you horizons and put words in my purse
to hire this part of the coast for you
and all the coloured boats jigging in the harbour.
Look, the white dynamos in the sea are moving
and I send you the sound of such machines
threshing blades of water and the striped fathoms under
the tamping sea. Breathe and the world comes alive;
for by an August reprieve ocean birds rise
across my eyes to the roofs of this talking town,
ever over above the nonconformist public house
shaped like a ship and its wagging clock.
I write this postcard to you in water-colour
from this cobbled sanctuary of sea-ghost entirely.
I know their shadows bumping over the working sea
and gulls treading air, riding and swooping
to a squawk over the button-eyed fish
drowning on the dry quayside. Fishermen I know
and their blue-jerseyed tales of melancholy brothers
breathing under eiderdowns of green feathery fathoms.
Yes, and what fourteen miracles in this fortnight
of renewals I could tell you of where I clambered
over rocks by the deleted sand when a sounding
storm was up. Look, I walk where the spirit
walks further over the religious waves, and the world
comes alive. I know this white printed town
with August money in its pocket, the ozone tourists
and Sunday lovers in caves, the magic well
and the vertical death of the drowned.
Especially at night the revelation nearer than
the hoot of owl or testimony of night-jar inland;
such amphibious cries I know, clear with
the dark taste of iodine and the salt-smelling dark.
At night such wide skies and tides of stars
I know, tumbled precariously in glittering midnights
pinned convexly from sea to land.
And below always the cruel sentence of the white-
haired drowned gnawing at the osseous shore.
Ears there are like girl shells listening to
the buoy-whistling sailors in the two-time swell,
but I will not tell the secret of the dog chained
growling sea scrambling up the beach for a bone.
Or the mysteries of luminous others, gone, departed,
the invisible made visible, intimations for the faithless,
who also dreamt of space and distance and possibles;
but sign my name in sand, like a fool lately,
under this tumour of words blown by a sad holiday
across the lamps in the sea and the inverted harbour.

Dannie Abse

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Communications

Twilight of Liberalism?

SIR—Mr. Colin Clark will forgive me for saying that his views on Spanish liberals are strangely insular. He writes:

"The Spanish liberals believed, as other Spaniards have done, that the right way to promote their ideas was by armed insurrection and civil war, and they led their unhappy country into the first of that series of civil wars from which it has suffered."

This is not correct. To raise to the dignity of "belief" the dire necessity of recurring to arms in the face of Ferdinand VII's stubborn and stupid refusal to govern otherwise than by brute force is to juggle with history. After all, Cromwell did not vanquish the Stuarts with speeches. And as for "the complete extirpation of the Christian faith" which Mr. Colin Clark considers as one of the aims of the Spanish liberals (all but a few exceptions which he is good enough to grant), it is enough to say that a number of distinguished priests figured among the leaders of liberalism at the Cortes of Cádiz, and that so far as I can remember there was not a single Spanish liberal in the 19th century who was not a devout Catholic and that few 20th century Spanish liberals would not welcome a *modus vivendi* with Rome.

The trouble is that Spanish liberals have always been up against a reactionary Church which refused all compromise whatever on liberty. If you, Sir, but printed a straight translation of the Concordat recently agreed between Rome and Franco Spain, Mr. Colin Clark would be reduced to a painful silence.

SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA

London, S.W.1

SIR—It was a pleasure to read Colin Clark's sallies against "Liberalism" in the August issue of ENCOUNTER. But I must say that he has got hold of a completely wrong stick to beat that dead horse! Is it really the worst thing one has to say against "Liberalism" that the word is just a label that can be stuck on to any bottle of political ideology or economic theory?

Liberalism is at once a school of thought and a way of thinking. As a school of thought, it was made to find its expression politically in the doctrine of representative democracy and economically in the theory of free enterprise. The "Founding Fathers"—if one can at all so speak—incorporated these expressions into the dogma of *laisser-faire*, and made these expressions also those of liberalism as a way of thinking and living. But this need not have been so. It is clearly possible for a person to be against the dogma of *laisser-faire*, and yet be an ardent liberal in the wider and nobler sense of the word. In the political field, this came to be recognised by the latter-day liberals themselves, while in the realm of economic-welfare theory, it came to be agreed among liberals that industries operating under conditions of increasing returns made the assumptions of free market mechanism highly untenable both in abstract theory and in real life. In fact, I did not think of Colin Clark as anything but a liberal when I read his attacks against these classical premises in his preface to *The Conditions of Economic Progress*. . . .

Thus the charge which Colin Clark marshals with brilliant vigour against "Liberalism," namely that it is in reality nothing but an umbrella-name for all sorts of odd theories, is one which will be gladly welcomed by such people like myself who see in liberalism not so much a school of thought but a way of living and thinking. . . .

One point more before I end. Colin Clark refers to a recent statement of the liberal economist, Beveridge, to the effect that liberalism is not against protection. I have not read the context in which this statement was made. But Keynes and Beveridge have both been liberals, and yet have in the light of certain abnormal situations openly advocated policies of protection. Many liberals would freely concede that in such conditions as those of unemployment of resources in an advanced economy or

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under-employment in the case of under-developed economies, the blind application of liberal principles is not only morally unjustifiable but also economically wasteful. The tragic tale of international economic co-operation in the inter-war years was one of the blind application of the classical liberal slogan of tariffs as the root of all economic ills; and the no less tragic coming into power of the Nazi régime in Germany was very largely the blind application of the slogans of parliamentary democracy with perfect right to the enemies of liberalism to kill liberals and perfect freedom of speech, to those who did not believe in it. If, therefore, at times liberalism has to curtail itself, it does so only to live more fully. Liberalism needs to be saved from some of its passionate devotees!

FREDIE A. MEHTA

London, N.W.3

Peace Poetry?

SIR—It is a pity that Mr. Stephen W. Pollak ("The Restive Mind," ENCOUNTER, July, 1954) does not seem to know the whole of Vitezlav Nezval's "Song of Peace." Nezval's "rendering unto Cæsar what is Cæsar's" is not confined to rather routine-like slogans like "We are a hundred millions" and "Surge ahead, facing the foe. . .", but is not ashamed even of the following stanzas:

So that never again those pilots,
Diseased with Gonorrhoea,
Like robots drop bombs on Korea,
I sing my song of peace.

Let the jackal Truman make his threatening screams;
I am singing, standing on guard.
I am singing my song of peace.

I wonder whether Mr. Pollak, knowing that, would still detect here a genuine poetical praise of peace.

J. W. BRUEGEL

London, N.W.11

The Aspidistra and the Bomb

SIR—Your columns are not, perhaps, the place for literary arguments, all the same I should like to draw your attention to what seems to me to be a widespread misinterpretation of George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Your reviewer finds that "in the end Orwell reprieves his Doppelgänger": the publisher's "blurb" states that "a note of hope ultimately breaks through": and Mr. Wyndham Lewis has written "the story ends very happily indeed." In the final chapter we find Gordon Comstock engaged in "The Queen of Sheba's" appalling advertising campaign against "Pedic Perspiration," gloating over the new furniture, "their own—at least, so long as they didn't get behind with the instalments!", and buying, in all seriousness, an aspidistra. The bombers are still there, in *Coming up for Air* the bombers are there again, and in the later books it is surely fair to say that the bombers have arrived. Is not this the implied background to the futility of Gordon's "reprieve," and is not "Vicisti O Aspidistra!" a curious "note of hope"? I have wondered whether Orwell would not have delighted in the apparent relationship, the bigger the bomb the bigger the bush. As protection against the H-bomb we have that even larger monster, the Rubber Plant.

CYRIL LUCAS

Little Ormesby, Norfolk

Down with Work

SIR—One would have expected Daniel Bell's "Notes on Work" to include observations on our attitude to work which is fast taking the form of a cult. Work has come to be the most glorified virtue of the day; its humble origin as Adam's curse cannot shade its halo. . . .

This cult of work is probably strongest in the U.S. though an open adoration is to be seen only within the Communist states. The son of a well-to-do father at an American University will proceed to do labour during vacations to justify his existence to himself and others. He employs this time in study or cultural pursuits at the risk of being branded a parasite. It is the acid test of his worth as a human being. Ostensibly he works to earn, but in reality his earning is just the measure of the work done. . . .

Work is identified with hard labour, physical or mental. It is not only not having to earn a living that is regarded as sinful, but also earning an easy one—even if it implies unusual gifts. It is a shocking waste of talent and capacity for enjoyment. If it helps the majority to drown their real or imaginary sorrows and to escape boredom it also prevents a number of sensitive people from enjoying their means with a clear conscience.

People we call primitive have not yet lost their sense of proportion. When Ford started a rubber plantation in South America he insisted on paying the Indians the same wages as the rest. An Indian then could earn enough in a day to last more than a week and began to report for work once a week only. He perhaps went too far, but we cannot deny the fundamental sanity of his attitude.

M. S. DEOL
Genetics Department,
University College

London, W.C.1.

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BOOKS

A Reminder

AT FIRST sight of a Nazi concentration camp could be disturbingly unimpressive. I remember mine at Schirmeck in Alsace. There was little to indicate what kind of institution had been located here, and the most natural supposal was that a model barracks had been recently built and more recently vacated. Some of the detail did not fit the guess, however. The furnace was extraordinarily large for any normal use it might have had in a barracks of this size, and neatly stacked in a room next to the furnace were about thirty coffins, fitted with handles for carrying, and without lids. There were also, in a perfectly swept room adjoining the coffins, two large neatly shaped mounds. One was formed of old shoes, the other of human hair. You needed to put the furnace, and the coffins, and the shoes, and the hair together in a logical pattern before you could see what things had been done in this place, but even when you understood you were not likely to be swayed by feeling. There was absolutely nothing to shock in the spectacle of these cleanly empty buildings and their strong smell of antiseptic. The first impression on most people who saw Schirmeck was of an utterly strange area of experience: so much crime and so much normality quietly conjoined made no sense.

Dr. Elie A. Cohen partly confirms and partly contradicts that first impression in his remarkable book *Human Behaviour in the Concentration Camp*.* He is a physician in general practice with a wide, but not, I presume, professional acquaintance with psychoanalytical theory, and his aim is to give a scientific picture of modern persecution by relating the conduct of the persecutors and their victims to Freudian ideas. The result is impressively successful, the success being obtained, however, in spite of two blemishes on the book, such as are often met with in psychoanalytical literature. These blemishes are some laboured writing and some unacceptable laying down of the law.

One example may show the kind of incompetent writing with which this science has become associated and which Dr. Cohen has allowed to mar many of his pages. Discussing the sexual predicaments of the prisoners he is capable of this sort of thing:

> The new arrivals. Although these were, as a rule, still in a good state of nutrition, they did not show the least sexual interest. This may be accounted for by the initial reaction and its consequences, or, as Bluhm has put it: "Sexual energies, like other libidinal energies, were withdrawn in order to rescue the ego from an overpowering excitation. The ego, frustrated by the outer world to an almost unbearable extent, abandoned its genital claims as it abandoned other forms of object libido."

After another paragraph in this style Dr. Cohen says of the typical prisoner and his sexual passions: "Popularly expressed, he had other things to worry about." I think the author should have said "Lucidly expressed." If psychoanalysis is to enrich and clarify day-to-day thought it really must hurry up and learn a language in place of the verbose, erudite, and polyglot slang which it uses at present.

* *Human Behaviour in the Concentration Camp*. By ELIE A. COHEN. Jonathan Cape. 18s.

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The second blemish appears at its worst at an important point in the book, where Dr. Cohen discusses the character of Hitler. He seems to attach great importance to an article by Miss G. M. Kurth, published in the 1948 Year Book of Psychoanalysis, on the origin of Hitler's Anti-Semitism, and to judge by the quotations from her essay Miss Kurth is quite peculiarly prone to the bad habit of over-confident statement. She believes that the fact of Hitler's mother having been treated by a Jewish doctor in her last illness had a critical effect on her son's mind. She says:

> The intimacy between the doctor and Frau Hitler was conducive to a "confusion" of the doctor with his father in Adolf's psychopathology. Brutal assault, mutilation, was represented by the ablation of her breast. "Poisoning" by "injection" was represented, during the last months of her illness, by the doctor's almost daily hypodermics of morphine to alleviate the suffering woman's pain. While Hitler was consciously imbued with gratitude towards the kind doctor, unconsciously he made him the "incestuous poisoning murderer" of his mother, the lascivious and aggressive father with whom he could not identify himself—and now in reality a Jew.

This is all very ingenious but, unless she was his intimate friend, how can Miss Kurth possibly know whether such was the origin of Hitler's racial mania? And should there not be at least mention in the book of a more obvious and commonplace genesis? All Hitler's racial theories are to be found in a more refined form but with little essential difference in Houston Stewart Chamberlain's book *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. The disreputable, gifted, and famous man who, in his old age, acknowledged Adolf Hitler as his spiritual heir, and even went to the trouble of laying his hands bishopwise on the young scurfy head of the Führer-to-be, was at least likely to have been important in the latter's mental development, and as much cannot be said for certain of the doctor. But the idea of the doctor's influence is more interesting psychoanalytically, and so it is treated not as a pure speculation but as though it were open to proof.

These then are the faults of the book: a tendency towards using a wearisome type of language which fails in the main purpose of language, and a tendency to fall in love with the subtleties of psychological theory. They should be mentioned, but they are not such as to take away seriously from the book's value, which is very high.

There are two main themes: the effect of persecution on its victims, and the nature of the persecuting impulse. It might be thought that everything that could be said on the first of these themes has already been said by a multitude of witnesses. This is not so. Few of those who have told at first hand about the revival of organised persecution in the civilised world have been able to retain the balanced view of suffering which illumines this book, and very few people in the world have, or ever have had, Dr. Cohen's saintly detachment from personal grief. This is an eminently fair record written, without hatred, by a man who lost his wife and son and other members of his family in the hell which he so exactly and thoughtfully describes. If such a man had chosen to idealise the victims and work up indignation against the murderers no one but an incurable prig could have blamed him. But instead he has told the truth as he saw it, not all of it to the credit of his fellow-sufferers, and what can be said in extenuation of the SS has been put down candidly.

To consider first what he says of the victims; his most remarkable opinion is that they were often in the power of the SS, not only physically but spiritually as well, because while they were a "crowd," their masters formed a coherent body, which Dr. Cohen distinguishes as a "group." From this fact it followed that a great spiritual need of every camp victim was to exchange the helplessness of the crowd for the inner strength of group-membership, and Dr. Cohen has no doubt that the best means of achieving this was to be found in religious fellowship. To be a sincere Christian, or a sincere Communist, or to be a sincere Zionist, like Dr. Cohen, offered a prisoner a hope of survival denied to the more ordinary run of men in an age of popular scepticism. Only a few could survive without any form of religion, and what happened to the majority of prisoners who lacked its group-idealism was that they fell under an inferiority complex which could, and apparently very often did, turn to hero-worship of the SS Camp Commander.

Dr. Cohen makes this very curious question of hero-worship credible by pointing out that the life of a concentration camp prisoner

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became as purely instinctive as a human life can become, and he strengthens this part of his argument by associating it with the low suicide-rate among the prisoners. It would seem that what happened was that the "ungrouped" prisoner had to group himself under someone, and ultimately he did this under the SS leader. The father-character had been taken out of the prisoner's life, and ultimately he was likely to find this in his torturer and murderer. By a further paradox he could do this because the very nature of SS organisation made it difficult for anyone in contact with its personnel, even the contact of victim with executioner, to have human feelings about these people. There was little personal hatred for the SS among its captives. I might have found this part of the book quite impossible to follow or believe if I had not met a state of mind, such as Dr. Cohen describes, among several ex-prisoners, at the time of my visit to tidy Schirmeck.

It followed naturally enough from the disposition of prisoners to glamourise the camp officials that the worst of the prisoners found it possible to help in carrying out some atrocities from which even the SS drew back in disgust. Much has been said, and rightly said, about the magnificent courage of men who were imprisoned in the camps and did not surrender their faith or principles, but documents such as Dr. Cohen's book serve to remind us that the concentration camps were not schools for heroism, and that what they did to most men was to make them idiotic and evil. The fruit of so much evil was intensely evil.

THE second theme is even more extraordinary: how a well-educated, advanced, and apparently decent people like the Germans produced these monstrous cruelties. One thing needs to be recognised: that the scale and mercilessness of these crimes have not been exaggerated for the simple reason that they hardly could be exaggerated. Propaganda in the war was often fallacious on the subject, but it was never more outrageous than the facts. In the Auschwitz Camp children were burnt alive in pits. The process was described by one who saw it and who said: "Compared with this the Inferno of Dante seems to me a comedy." The witness was a professor of distinguished standing who had joined the SS, and who came to regard such horrors as part of normal routine. How did such a man come to be associated daily with such deeds?

Dr. Cohen's main point in attempting to elucidate the appalling phenomenon of the SS is that we must consider it as a result of faulty education. He quotes authorities who assert that among Germans the ego has been "insufficiently developed or . . . crushed by educational, social, or other forces." This resulted, he believes, in "a criminal super-ego because Hitler's ideas took possession of it." In other words German education having left Germans with an "emptiness of the ego sphere," left them thereby helpless before the fascination which could be exerted by a father-leader-generalissimo figure such as that of Hitler. Dr. Cohen does not say so, but it is clear that the "ungrouped" prisoners and the SS both came by different paths to the same doom.

I believe that Dr. Cohen puts too much stress on the brutality of German education, especially home education, and too little on the accompanying circumstances of demoralised inter-war Germany. Under a national ill-health of the spirit such as afflicted the Weimar Republic, any education, good or bad, with leadership and severity in it, our own public-school kind for example, could easily have bred the Nazi perversion. But where Dr. Cohen is unquestionably right, in my opinion, is in stressing the terrifying fact that the men who did these deeds were not abnormal in themselves but had been made so by uncritical obedience to a corrupt national leadership. He emphasises that we are wrong to regard this Nazi leadership as corrupt in the sense of being frivolously self-seeking. Rather had the leaders been made subhuman by solemn belief in their hideous fantasies. Himmler really seems to have thought that he was doing great good in the world, and Hitler was perspicaciously described by Jung in 1946 as suffering from "that form of hysteria which is distinguished by a capacity for believing one's own falsehood." Sir Neville Henderson recorded in his memoirs that after the seizure of Prague in 1939 Hitler wanted to visit the hospital where the German victims of Czech persecution were lying, forgetting not only that these martyrs were non-existent, but that he himself had ordered their press-fabrication.

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THERE was a crazy sincerity in Nazism which gave it much of its power and its peculiar character. As we might expect, that character was closely reflected in the party élite. There was plenty of sadism, and we hear of elegant little parties being given to view the atrocities, but among the SS officials a serious attitude towards these things, a conception of them as harsh and disagreeable duties which had to be performed cheerfully for the sake of the cause, was more common. Though Dr. Cohen, with typical generosity, gives in full and without any sceptical comment, the testimony heard at Nuremberg that the experimental atrocities carried out by SS doctors were of high scientific value, the only defence that can be validly urged for the SS is this repulsive earnestness, without which they could hardly have done what they did.

There is no denying that all military training teaches all soldiers that their duty may require them to commit abominable actions. This book teaches us that the crime of the SS was not that they were the first to depart from the moral standards acknowledged by our civilisation, but that they followed accustomed and tolerated departures to lengths not dared before them by people of civilised tradition, or people who took pride (as they did) in being civilised. Their crime was not in their originality but in their excess. They took certain normal patterns of behaviour to their logical conclusions, and it may have been that in many cases they were surprised when they found that the highway of normalcy ended in crimes whose vastness and horror are almost beyond imagination. It remains to say that in less civilised lands those crimes are still being committed today, as they always have been, and that no one today should feel quite certain that civilisation and barbarism are the separate things of common belief.

Christopher Sykes

THE "BROTHERS' WAR"

A CIVIL war occupies in the life of a nation somewhat the place that a nervous collapse occupies in the life of an individual. It signifies a breakdown of the patterns of response and control; and it creates a great tormenting perplexity which lingers and exhausts until it can be finally resolved. If psychoanalysis can be the means of resolution for the individual, when memory, sufficiently provoked and confronted, passes from aggravation to healing, so history in a rough way can be a means by which a nation comes to terms with the agonies of its past. As therapy, history is no doubt even less reliable than psychoanalysis. Still, case histories are often interesting even when they do not conclude in a cure; and the permutations of historical interpretation may cast light on a nation's inner tensions, even if the tensions survive.

Mr. Pressly, as the title of his book* suggests, addresses himself to the problem of what Americans have made of their Civil War. This searing fraternal conflict has been America's national trauma. The "brothers' war" rent the country down the middle, tearing apart states and towns and families, leaving in its trail hatred and bitterness, guilt and remorse. For nearly a century Americans have been struggling to come to terms with so convulsive an experience. The search has taken place in many fields—Paul H. Buck's *The Road to Reunion* remains the best account of the travail of reconciliation—and historical writing has by no means been the most important or the most successful. Yet, in so far as understanding is a step towards healing, the succession of historical interpretations may be considered to provide the most systematic and responsible record of this exercise in national introspection.

American historians have examined interpretations of the Civil War before; but no one has done it so tactfully, incisively, and comprehensively as Mr. Pressly. He has read widely in the literature, from the accounts which hit the press while the guns were still smoking at Sumter to the great technical histories written generations later; his judgement is consistently fair-minded and intelligent; and he succeeds brilliantly in relating the writing of history to

**Americans Interpret Their Civil War.* By THOMAS J. PRESSLY. Princeton University Press. $5. (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege. 40s.)

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the personality of the historian, to the state of the profession, and to the intellectual and psychological needs of the day. The result is not only a fascinating venture in intellectual history but also a revealing document both of stresses in the American mind and of intractabilities in the nature of history.

THE first phase of Civil War interpretation was predictable enough. Under the direct pressure of war, each side straightforwardly assigned virtue to itself and evil to the enemy. Northerners wrote of "the War of the Rebellion" and Southerners of "the War between the States," each seeking to sanctify its own constitutional case by enshrining it in the very name of the war. Mr. Pressly distinguishes a third contemporary approach, which he calls the "peace interpretation"—the view advanced by a tiny minority on both sides that needless war had been precipitated by blundering and emotionalism. This, however, was a minor dissonance in the major conviction held by both North and South that the war was a necessary outcome of a mortal struggle between good and evil.

But emotions essential for war are hard to sustain in peace, as we know so well today. In the years after Appomattox, responsible men, North and South, felt keenly the need for reconciliation—for "bridging the bloody chasm"; and history reflected these impulses. Under the influence of James Ford Rhodes particularly, a new interpretation, which Mr. Pressly calls the "nationalist tradition," came into prominence. The "nationalist tradition," abandoning the pursuit of guilty men, sought to shift responsibility to history, explaining the tragedy in terms which would fix exclusive or personal blame on neither North nor South. "Both sides were right!" cried one historian. "Neither could have given in and have remained true to itself." In such terms, the conflict could be analysed as "irrepressible," its responsibility ascribed to impersonal historical forces, its emotions transcended, the Northern triumph accepted, the Southern sacrifice vindicated—everything interpreted as a tragic but honourable crisis of national development. It was this period in historical writing which established the name "Civil War."

Yet new needs continued to create new interpretations. The next generation was less concerned with the old issues of the Civil War than with the new issues thrown up by industrialisation and business supremacy in the forty years after the war. The young historians, under the spell of the movement of progressive reform and of such leaders as Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, Bryan, and La Follette, looked back at the Civil War through new lenses. If a confident and aggressive capitalism were the enemy, and if capitalist power were built upon the national mastery it had gained through the war which destroyed the slave power, then could not this logic be pushed back to explain the origins of the war itself? Charles A. Beard, reasoning in somewhat this way, developed his portrait of the Civil War as the "Second American Revolution," in which Northern business eliminated all rivals in its march to power—a portrait so dominated by Beard's distaste for the rising plutocracy that, as Mr. Pressly observes, "the Southern planters very nearly became the heroes of the narrative." The Beard view received some support from the Marxists, though the Marxists, accepting the capitalist triumph as a prerequisite of the proletarian revolution, were far less indignant than Beard about the post-war plutocracy.

The economic interpretation represented one attack on the "nationalist tradition." Another came from the development of professional historical scholarship in the South, with local graduate training, historical associations, and learned journals. This coincided with a renewal of sectional tension, as the South felt itself increasingly the victim of the economic exploitation and moral self-righteousness of the North; and the result was a revival of Confederate patriotism and a new vindication of the South.

But the most powerful attack on the nationalist tradition came from the movement known as "revisionism" and associated particularly with James G. Randall and Avery O. Craven. The revisionist thesis was simple and consoling. It was that a "blundering generation" had transformed a "repressible conflict" into a "needless war" which benefited no one and which, with sense and statesmanship, could have been avoided. Revisionism, as Mr. Pressly points out, had much in common with the "peace interpretation" of the Civil War period; but its momentum now came from the widespread disillusionment which followed the First World War and from the popular tendency to blame that war—and hence all wars—on nationalism, emotionalism, and propaganda.

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The revisionists seemed to take it for granted that war was always useless, that war never settled any issue in a desirable manner, and that war was always the worst possible alternative in human relations. To assume anything else, suggested Randall, was not to be "enlightened"—or, as Mr. Pressly paraphrases Randall, not to be in accord with "an optimistic view of the universe."

FOR a moment, revisionism seemed to dominate the field. But it too has begun to pass. Its vogue was in part an obvious function of optimism about man and history—an optimism gradually discredited by the rise of totalitarianism in the mid-20th century. The methods and successes of Nazism and Communism seemed to refute the easy old assumptions about the virtue, rationality, and perfectibility of man; frustration, tragedy, and evil began to appear to constitute, not the exception, but the nature of history; people began to lose confidence, in Reinhold Niebuhr's words, in "the possibility of an easy resolution of the tension between individual and community, or between classes, races, and nations." It became conceivable that human beings could work themselves into insoluble situations—that history occasionally moved into conditions of log-jam which could be burst only by violence. This more sombre view of man could accept the Civil War, not as inexplicable insanity, but as a tragic necessity.

Revisionism was in part, too, the function of a certain moral neutralism—of the belief that war was so much the worst evil that everything else should be sacrificed to avoiding it. But the totalitarian threat now suggested that there might be evils even worse than war, and certainly that there were things worth dying for and worth fighting against—and that the right of one man to own another as a slave might well be one of those issues on which neutrality was intolerable. Together, the new sense of the frailty of man and of the horror of slavery made the Civil War far more understandable than it had seemed almost since it had been fought.

Mr. Pressly leaves the issue here, concluding on the ironic note that the interpretation of the Civil War has rarely been more bitterly debated than it is today: "the further the Civil War receded into the past, the greater the disagreement among twentieth-century historians

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over its causes, and the greater the strength of the emotions with which these divergent viewpoints were upheld."

His able book suggests other questions. Indeed, the problem it poses should find a responsive audience among the readers of Professor Herbert Butterfield; for the American Civil War would seem to be a prime example of "the absolute predicament and the irreducible dilemma" whose role in history has so engaged Professor Butterfield's penetrating attention. Contemporary history, as Professor Butterfield sees it, is history as melodrama, with heroes and villains; it is only with the passage of time that contemporary history gives way to academic history, history as tragedy, in which men are seen as impartially trapped in some sort of structural impasse. "The higher historiography moves away from melodrama and brings out the tragic element in human conflict." The moral of this, in Professor Butterfield's eyes, is apparently twofold: for the historian, it is to stay away from contemporary history, lest he make a fool of himself by treating tragedy in terms of melodrama; and, for the citizen, it is to refrain from taking sides too vigorously today because the higher historiography of the future will discern no clear rights or wrongs in present conflicts.

It is obvious that Mr. Pressly's account of American Civil War historiography fails to bear out Professor Butterfield's neat classification of the phases of historical writing. Instead of passing from melodrama to tragedy, from partisan propaganda to serene acceptance, the interpretation of the Civil War has moved nearly full circle and is almost as tense today as it was in 1865. Now conceivably this might prove only the incompetence of American historians; but it might also prove the irrelevance of Professor Butterfield's analysis, and particularly of his sharp distinction between contemporary history and academic history. If an historian is interested in past problems, it is in part because these problems are related in some way, however dim, to present hopes or anxieties. If history is not in this sense contemporary to him, then he no doubt achieves a kind of detachment from it; but this kind of detachment can perhaps be better designated as indifference; and it is precisely this indifference which prevents him from reaching the deeper truth about the great issues for which men bled and died in the past.

If all vital history is, in this sense, contemporary history, need all history be melodrama? Professor Butterfield would seem at times to contend that the realm of decision and action is necessarily melodramatic, while the tragic sense is attainable only through contemplation and renunciation. If we only understand sufficiently the sinfulness of men and the tragedy of history, he appears to say, then we would never be sure enough of the rightness of our own cause to go to war in its defence. The humility which he would have history teach us would thus seem incompatible with the self-righteousness he believes to be required for decisions of life and death. But does not the tragedy of history lie exactly in the opposite consideration—in the fact that, aware of the vanity of their cause and the frailty of their judgement, statesmen must nevertheless still take great and terrible decisions, that tragedy and melodrama are inseparable?

Professor Butterfield writes eloquently about "absolute human predicaments"; but one senses in him the feeling that these predicaments really aren't absolute after all, that they could be resolved if only men would anticipate the lessons of the higher historiography, that we could surmount them if only we would refrain from the self-righteousness of supposing our side to be manifestly superior to those, who, in their own delusions, seek to destroy us. Yet this attempt to escape from inescapable decision is surely a form of sentimentalism as bad as the identification of one's own cause with the Kingdom of God.

The recognition of human limitation must not, Dr. Niebuhr has warned, lead to a betrayal of cherished values and historical attainments. It is here that the American Civil War is so significant, for no modern statesman has had a better sense of both human limitation and human responsibility than Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln knew as well as Professor Butterfield the elements of pretence and vanity in his own cause; he knew the tragic predicament of the enemy; but he knew too that none of this relieved him from the proximate obligations of decisions and action. "This combination of moral resoluteness about the immediate issues with a religious awareness of another dimension of meaning and judgment," Dr. Niebuhr

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has written of Lincoln, "must be regarded as almost a perfect model of the difficult but not impossible task of remaining loyal and responsible toward the moral treasures of a free civilisation on the one hand while yet having some religious vantage point over the struggle."

This is the task to which we are summoned today: humility and contrition as we act, but not self-abasement which cuts the nerve of action. History is tragic because human striving is both precarious *and* necessary. The new tendencies in Civil War historiography, I believe, emerge from a fresh understanding of the complexity and ambiguity of history—history in which tragedy and melodrama are irretrievably commingled. Mr. Pressly's book illuminates many more problems than those to which it is formally addressed.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Sins and Symbols

THE *Death Bell** is the first selection of the new Poetry Society. All concerned are to be congratulated on an auspicious beginning, for this first book is a very fine one. If the selection committee can continue to offer such volumes to members, the Poetry Society will doubtless have a salutary effect on the reading standards of a large section of the British people.

What will first strike the many readers who will now come, perhaps for the first time, to the consideration of a large compact body of Vernon Watkins' verse is the tremendous change of attitude which must have overtaken English poets since the heyday of Pound and Eliot. During the twenties and even, to some extent, the thirties the poet was concerned with a kind of bitter pin-pricking, a deflation of rhetorical language and of high-falutin' ideas. It was done, of course, for the sake of honesty, for the sake of poetry, but much of the public could never get over its initial squeamishness at what appeared to be imaginative crudity and emotional cynicism. With Mr. Watkins there will be no such difficulties. His diction is as lofty as the most confirmed Miltonian could desire and his eyes are always firmly fixed on the "timeless" values of the Christian religion. In this he is typical of a whole generation of poets, whom I shall call "symbolist," but his sustained virtuosity and precision are typical of nothing but a very unusually exalted sense of the craft of verse.

His new book is divided into two sections—one of poems and one of ballads, with the title poem isolated at the end of the volume. Of the two, I prefer the ballads. Their language is crisper; their imagery more concrete. In one of them, "The Trial of Sodom," he presents a simple and particular situation, the dialogue between God and Abram, with a moving simplicity. But this is not typical, not even of his ballads. In the poems, he removes himself to a greater distance from the concrete and particular: "this preposterous pragmatical pig of a world" is not for him. It is true that he usually takes some particular event, myth, or animal as the starting point, but he then goes on to display, with intimate understanding, the philosophical or theological implications of that initial existence. He takes it, that is, and transforms it through a series of other, and more generalised, situations or propositions until it becomes a symbol for some "eternal truth." Put like that the whole process may smack of mathematics yet it has a highly respectable tradition behind it—the symbolist tradition. In the work of contemporary poets I must admit that I find it rather frightening. They seem unable to transform their "eternal truth" back into terms of the particular event. In other words, they are unable to make moral sense of their philosophy and theology. Mr. Watkins is aware of this difficulty:

> *Or who can match the speed*
> *Of whirling nebulæ*
> *To the Samaritan's deed*
> *Performed in sympathy?*

Yet he does not attempt any practical reply: indeed, he cannot. The form he has chosen is

* *The Death Bell.* By VERNON WATKINS. Faber and Faber. 10s. 6d.

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such that all practical replies are lost in a welter of generalities. His subjects lose their particular identities and become figments, mere images of the meaning which Mr. Watkins chooses to attach to them. His "Death Bell" is not a bell. It is merely a symbol for the resurrection, and practically any other object could be substituted for it without altering the meaning, provided the substitution was consistently employed throughout all the other images in the poem. Its function is the same as that of x in algebra.

This process of generalising an object into a symbol seems to me to be the wrong way of writing poetry. Think, for example, of a generalised "Ancient Mariner." In "The Ballad of the Rough Sea," Mr. Watkins does give us generalised fishermen. When we first meet them they are drifting for herring. In the following stanza they are using baited lines, perhaps for cod. In the third, last verse they are trying to catch "a creel of fish"—presumably lobsters. There would thus seem to be at least three different sets at work, or the same set at three different times. They are Everyman sailing the rough sea of life. They are us. Now, this is all very well but, by trying to embrace so many factors Mr. Watkins has lost his original, quite definite, fishermen, and replaced them with a vague and inadequate picture of the fishing industry. His original point of actual men being in mortal danger at sea is thus blunted. Coleridge was much wiser. We can accept the fantastic adventures of his Mariner because they all happened to one man—a rather odd man by any estimate. We do not have to admit that they might happen to us. Because of this lack of compunction we are more ready to admit that the significance of his adventures to the Mariner may be paralleled by the significance to us of quite different events in our own life.

Several other books in this symbolist manner have recently appeared but *The Death Bell* is so much better than the others that it seems wiser, and more kind, to concentrate upon it. Some readers, aware of its distinction, will be surprised by the frequency with which it is littered with such phrases as "violent fury," "rock-like Word," and "pure glory," and lines like

> *There is a light upon the water now*
> *That makes the lands all gay*

or

> *The dead may be heard to sing.*

This should not disturb them. Thirty years ago such phrases might have been described as "banal." Since then, however, we have learned a great deal. Professor Jung has taught us that the images which we had wrongly diagnosed as "hackneyed" were really "archetypal."

Rhythmically, Mr. Watkins is not quite flawless—but that is chiefly because he attempts such difficult feats. More important, there is often a serious inadequacy in his syntactic arrangements. This is in part an inheritance from the middle period of the work of W. B. Yeats from which Mr. Watkins has learned a great deal of his craftsmanship. Ezra Pound's severe strictures of the great Irishman were occasioned by this grammatical stiffness—for Pound, no matter what his faults, has a marvellously sensitive appreciation of the tone of the living language, the colloquial rhythm, the spasm of emphasis. Mr. Watkins has none. He arranges his words in the way that one has come to expect from very bad 19th century prose writers. He has no sense whatever of the importance of the English preposition. He literally turns his words over backwards in an attempt to avoid it—unless it is "of." This gives his long sentences a heavy-handed opaqueness and, let us say it, an obscurity which is quite unnecessary and not in the least Miltonic.

On this issue of syntax the Welsh raven would do well to take a lesson from the American whippoorwill. Our English language comes much fresher from the pen of Edna St. Vincent Millay* than it does from that of Vernon Watkins.

> *I had a gardener. I had him until haying time.*
> *In haying time they set him pitching hay.*
> *I had two gardeners. I had them until haying time.*
> *In haying time they set them pitching hay.*
> *I had three gardeners. I had them until haying time.*
> *—Can life go on this way?*

One remembers Confucius: "Do not despise this because of its simplicity." It is certainly a demonstration of how a rhetorical question ought to be asked, how it can be made unrhetorical. But notice, too, the beautiful use of the American idiom. In the second line "they" (i.e. other employers) set the gardener pitching hay, but the fourth line could equally well mean that the gardeners themselves set out to do the

* *Mine the Harvest.* By EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY. Hamish Hamilton Ltd. 12s. 6d.

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LONGMANS

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pitching. The more-than-arithmetic worsening of the situation is thus conveyed against a background of apparent repetition. This sort of delicate subtlety runs through much of Miss Millay's verse.

Edna St. Vincent Millay came in for a good deal of abuse during her lifetime; chiefly, as far as I can gather, because she had the effrontery to concentrate on the sonnet in the age of William Carlos Williams. It might therefore be thought that some pious praise is due her. I intend to give her none. What today I like about her work I liked when she was alive, and the present posthumous collection, though excellently edited and produced, probably suffers greatly from the fact that she left it unfinished.

She was not a great poet. When she imitated greatness she displayed her limitations at their narrowest. But she could never deserve being patronised. On the contrary, coming to her from the very fine work of Mr. Watkins, one is astonished at her richness. Beside her, he wears a glum and bloodless glint, a strained veneer, and, for all the controlled acrobatics of his images, he seems a little naïve, incapable of coming to grips with the world.

Miss Millay was no metaphysical ponderer; she had a feminine briskness and practicality. This is illustrated by her reaction to the Adonis myth. To her the hero seems silly to have gone off hunting a boar at a time when he might have got into bed with Venus and done what "All boys and girls with any sense/Would die to do." She deals with the world she can understand and she is not deficient in understanding.

Because of this practicality she has, in these poems, a better grasp of the unique event than have most of our English poets. Instead of being obsessed by its "uniqueness" (which is, after all, a metaphysical property shared by everything else) she tries simply to see it as an event—tries to describe it as clearly as possible and to understand the relevant interactions between herself and it. She appears to look at the world with humility, trying to be truthful, and when she has said what seems to be needful in describing all this, then the poem is finished. The form is the thing we are left with when she has done. This is necessarily a very hit-or-miss method of achieving a poetic unity but I have yet to see convincing proof that it is not the most effective. And Miss Millay's last book is not without poems as perfect as any of Mr. Watkins'.

Nevertheless there is a distressing uncertainty about most of her work. One is always expecting the poem to break down in the next line, and it often does. But it picks itself up again a few lines further on and continues, little the worse for its lapse into banality. Now, this is important. When a symbolist poem falters for a moment, it is irretrievably lost. Mr. Watkins cannot afford to make a mistake. His poems are built on the principle of perfection. In the more loosely constructed work of Miss Millay, human frailty is allowed for: she continually renews and refreshes her imagery, like Antæus his strength, direct from the earth itself and the world of men and women which she understood so well.

Just how deep that understanding was can only be gauged from her best poetry. Few of the "intellectuals" who patronised her could do more than mimic it. Her brilliant intelligence spins splendidly into a world of shades that they did not know existed. What she says about a young child could almost be taken as a statement of her own position in the literary world.

Pink and pale blue look well
In a nursery. And for the most part Baby is
really good:
He gurgles, he whimpers, he tries to get his toe
to his mouth; he slobbers his food
Dreamily—cereals and vegetable juices—onto
his bib:
He behaves as he should.

But do not for a moment believe he has forgot-
ten Blackness; nor the deep
Easy swell; nor his thwarted
Design to remain for ever there;
Nor the crimson betrayal of his birth into the
yellow glare.
The pictures painted on the inner eyelids of
children just before they sleep
Are not in pastel.

What I have said about *Mine the Harvest* does not apply to the sonnets in it. With two possible exceptions they are atrocious.

MISS MILLAY and Mr. Watkins have both given us books which display great talent and great honesty. Mr. George Barker is an entirely different matter. In the first place he is an incurable ranter, and the present volume * contains poems as bad as any he has written. I

* *A Vision of Beasts and Gods.* By GEORGE BARKER. Faber and Faber. 9s. 6d.

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HEINEMANN

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do not mention such lapses in a spirit of denigration. It is simply that many of his verses are so ridiculous that they tend to put off potential admirers—especially the more intelligent—and this is most unfortunate, for them. Because George Barker is a genius.

I know that the word is unfashionable, even impolite. Literary enthusiasm should be a concealed and diffused permeation, and should not be obtrusively concentrated on individual authors. I should not say that anyone is a genius (I might be wrong) but in this case I must, for it is the only word which precisely applies to the easy combination of rigorous intellectual force, intense sensuality, comic hard-headedness, and mystic purity, which exuberates through Mr. Barker's best poems. The others are properly forgotten and I do not intend to speak further about them.

In spite of his reckless habits of publication Mr. Barker is not a formless poet. On the contrary he has a finer grasp of logical form than practically any of his contemporaries. His poems work on a veritable maze of levels. Meaning is piled upon meaning, interwoven into it and bridged across it: yet there is never any vagueness. Instead, instructions spurt out at us, quite precise instructions, till he seems a didactic writer: yet he is never merely that. Because he defies classification many critics have called him formless, but many critics would find it difficult to appreciate that the human body had form unless it was dressed up as a skeleton—and Mr. Barker is not a skeletal writer. His formal conceptions come to us, full-fleshed in words, with hair and toenails, eyes and a powerful tongue.

His basic form is different from that of the symbolists. Instead of taking an ordinary situation or a second-hand myth and building it into an "archetype" he begins with the archetypal situation, makes it real by passionate everyday imagery, and then applies it to particular events. Thus the colloquy between Goodman Jacksin and the Angel is first made understandable in terms of their rich antagonism and then resolved by the practical discovery that love of any kind is necessarily sinful unless it be redeemed by an act of creation. What is vague (i.e. the archetype) is thus made clear by an appeal to the particular, whereas, in such poets as Mr. Watkins, what was clear (i.e. the particular) is made vague by an appeal to the archetype.

His poetry is distinguished from that of Miss Millay, on the other hand, by the presence of such massive symbolic creations as the Angel. He sees it, that is, as clearly as she sees her own children. He is familiar with God. He lives in sin with Satan. And he brings us near to them all. There is thus an inevitability about his description of the abstract principles who are his next-door neighbours, and that intimacy allows him to create truly universal poetic symbols. Miss Millay, in her strict literal honesty, can never attain this because the universe is never such an immediate problem to her. She can shelve off her own world from most of its encroachments. Barker, more vulnerable or more logical, cannot live in anything smaller than Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and the historical cosmos.

Although they may not be so intimately involved with it, symbolist poets can create these symbols for the immense universe. Their conceptual method is designed for that purpose. But it takes them a whole poem to do so. Having created the symbol they find themselves trapped with it and cannot get back to the world of their own lives, of other men, of meaning and morality.

Once it has been stated in these terms it is easy to see how it comes about that Barker is a creator of a different order from the others. He himself has described the process of his own poetry in some of his words on Justice:

> Towering the far side of a table
> Tall as the pregnant midnight she
> Crossed the floor, *stepped from a symbol,*
> *To bring judgment home to me.*

The italics are mine. To put it another way, Barker has taken that quantum jump which Coleridge first described from Fancy to Imagination, to an activity at once more powerful and more ordinary or matter-of-fact, of a sort different from anything which industry or honesty can ever hope, unhelped, to participate in. That is why he is a much better apologist for Catholicism than many more notoriously Christian writers. Even more than theology, his poetry encompasses morality. He tells me why birth control is evil. He tells me why we should all obey the Pope. He tells me why we should not erase one another with hydrogen bombs. He speaks out for all those unpopular aspects of the Catholic Church, the ones which most of its protagonists prefer to pass over

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quickly in order to get down to the "serious" business of defining indefinables. With most of what he tells me I heartily disagree, but he forces me to understand that I am disagreeing with the truth, and at my immortal peril. And even then he has not finished—but goes on to tell me that there is a very real sense in which our *acts* of sin do not matter, the sense which is the sense of God, for His love and His mercy are infinite. Thus Barker arrives, like Yeats before him but by a different path, to the point where he can accept his own sin and the sin of the world with genuine amusement, a gentle despairing good-humour, a happiness which is much more harrowing than any irony.

Burns Singer

POLITICS IN THE PALAIS-BOURBON

MR. WILLIAMS' long-awaited book* is either extraordinarily good or seriously disappointing, according to what the reader hopes for. The author has set himself a task severely limited in scope. The preface makes clear that he deliberately left out "administration, justice, and 'France overseas' . . . institutions not mentioned in the Constitution, the social and philosophical background." "Problems of policy," he adds, "are mentioned only when necessary to explain their impact on institutions or parties." Only the briefest notice is given to "institutions mentioned in the Constitution, but which do not impinge on domestic politics" and to "the influence of press and army, universities and trade-unions."

His real subjects are party organisation and party manœuvre, together with the written Constitution and its development during the first seven years, and on this narrow field his 450 tersely written pages project a beam of light so intense as to put all his fellow-specialists heavily in his debt. His abstraction and ordered presentation of everything that has appeared in French on these subjects in recent years, together with an exhaustive index, fifty pages long, will save many people hours of labour for years to come. He has succeeded, moreover, in approaching the separate parts of his analysis in the spirit and with the method of a political scientist trained in the British school, giving human behaviour more importance than rules of procedure and articles of Constitutions, and treating both as only parts of a total political reality. Mr. Williams thus escapes both the formalism of the French constitutional lawyers and most (though not all) of the artificial rigidities of the Duverger conception of political science. This is his only originality, but the scale and detail of its application make the book a pioneer work of major importance. It is a pity, however, that in his search for the material this method requires, Mr. Williams has on the one hand left out points which a little research would have provided, and on the other has taken a great deal of journalistic speculation at its face value.

Two, at least, of the omissions amount to major defects. Whatever the French themselves may think, the French Constitution is not just a set of rules concocted in 1946 and modified since. It is much more—and there is plenty to suggest that Mr. Williams knows this—a mass of conventions either wholly unwritten or surviving from earlier Constitutions, including even that of 1791, or hidden in laws, decrees, and rules of procedure. Much of it is not mentioned at all in the 1946 document and much more only by allusion. To try to discuss the Constitution as though the whole French nation had started afresh from a kind of collective constitutional amnesia in 1946 is to deny one of the author's own principal theses. The working of local government, of the *Conseil d'Etat*, the central administrations, and the para-governmental bodies are not external to the Constitution, but so central that the omission of any discussion of them distorts the whole picture.

IF the student of politics is thus destined to disappointment, so is the more general reader. The political journalist seeking information on the four major problems of current French politics—Indo-China, Tunisia, EDC

* *Politics in Post-war France: Parties and the Constitution in the Fourth Republic.* By PHILIP WILLIAMS. Longmans, Green and Co. 35s.

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and economic problems—will find about a hundred references in the index. But the only long passages are two and a half pages on political quarrels over economic policy and fourteen lines on events in Indo-China in 1953. From about half the rest, diligent search can disinter a few scattered scraps of information, but no more.

The effect of this deliberate omission of all discussion of political issues is also distorting. No doubt day-to-day politics as seen from the Palais Bourbon and the columns of *Le Monde* often look like mere manœuvres. No doubt French parties and politicians are often too preoccupied with the search for power. No doubt coherent policies matter far too little in French politics. But many, probably most, French politicians have joined their parties or groups from sincere conviction, and that fact itself is of political importance. Yet nobody would guess from Mr. Williams' pages that parties have either policy or purpose.

The one general theme to which Mr. Williams devotes some space is that of the effectiveness or otherwise of the machine he is describing. On this point, he follows faithfully some (but by no means all) of his French models. Most French official and some semi-official propaganda, in foreign countries, tries to claim that governmental weakness and instability do not matter much, partly because life goes on despite recurrent political crises, and partly because many individual Ministers stay in office for long periods.

Most of the apologists know (and admit when they are at home) that their first excuse no longer holds good since modern states took on their present range of activities, though they continue to behave as if it were still valid. They ought also to know that there has been no continuity at all in the main economic Ministries, that one Foreign Minister has admitted his own partial ineffectiveness, even during a long period of office, and that to the extent that there is continuity elsewhere, it can only be obtained at the cost of incoherence in Government policy as a whole. But Mr. Williams half accepts the official thesis. "A reinforcement of the powers of the Government," he says, ". . . is probably not the life and death matter it is often supposed to be." It all depends, as another Oxford man would have said, on what you mean by "a life and death matter." Mr. Williams gives four reasons why this reinforcement is nonetheless "desirable." Briefly, they are that instability leads to inadequate parliamentary control, governmental impotence and the domination of the bureaucracy; that it leaves too much power to organised vested interests; that it prevents the taking of measures which would make possible a long overdue programme of economic development; and finally, that it is "a liability alike to the action and to the reputation of France in her dealings with the rest of the world."

No friend of France outside and no French politician or political scientist of repute would challenge that formidable catalogue. But, if it does not epitomise the "life and death matters" of the politics of any industrialised democracy, what on earth *are* life and death matters? Frenchmen still believe, as Mr. Williams points out, in "the liberal democratic tradition," they want their country to play a major role in world politics, and every single one of them, whatever his professed economic and political beliefs, expects and demands energetic and day by day action from the Government in economic and social matters. To say that it is

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no more than "desirable" that Frenchmen should therefore find political mechanisms and modes of behaviour capable of allowing Governments to do what they demand of them is a monument of meiosis.

MR. WILLIAMS believes, quite rightly, that mere mechanical modifications would help only a little to produce the "desirable" changes, because the real difficulty is psychological. The French régime is designed to protect Frenchmen from some of the things they fear, not to give them those they want. Having established this, however, Mr. Williams goes on to suggest, with M. Goguel, "a change in the electoral law to encourage stronger, more coherent and more lasting coalitions." The proof that no conceivable law could do that can be found in Mr. Williams' own earlier pages.

On the problem of psychological change he is hopelessly defeatist. "The faults of the political structure of France," says Mr. Williams, "are the result of her historical and geographical background. No country can rid itself of its past."

But this is only partly true. "The past" is always changing. Every time today is added to yesterday, the sum total of "the past" is modified and, on occasions, even that difference can be significant. France's "past" was different on February 7th, 1934, from what it had been on February 5th. Longer periods have produced equally significant changes at other times and in no case has the element of conscious human will been wholly absent. Mr. Williams's view appears to be that Frenchmen created a different France in 1789, and went on making it different again through the 19th century, until some point (unstated) at which it became the "past," a prison whose walls set immutable bounds to human conduct.

It is right that the part of truth—which is considerable—in this view should be stated. But there are critics, both British and French, of the French régime and more especially of French habits of thought in politics, who think it more profitable at this stage to remind Frenchmen of the extent to which they are free to remake their past by behaving differently in the present. If the mass of French people have not so far tried to do this the fault is by no means entirely theirs. Most French politicians have been Bevanites, in the sense that they are contemptuous of their own followers and so prefer emotional distortion to political education. Fortunately for all of us, that is now changing. The great virtue of M. Mendès-France, even more than his capacity for decision, is his determination to make the effort to create an informed and intelligent electorate. If only he gets the time he needs, the French can yet give the lie to Mr. Williams by bursting out of the prison of history.

William Pickles

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